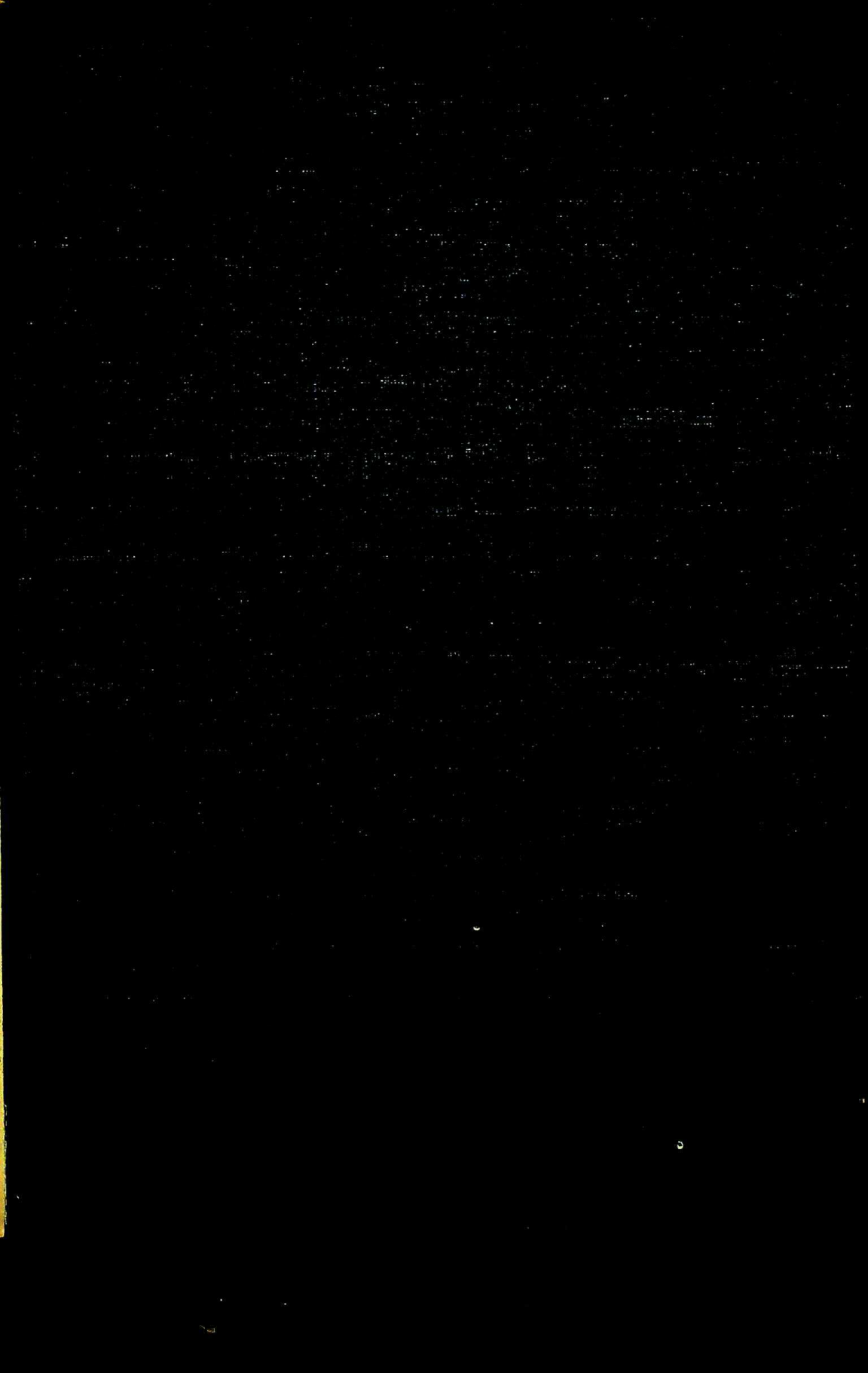


STEPHEN FUCHS

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At the Bottom of Indian Society



become very acute in India's social and political life. The problem of caste and untouchability has been discussed from various viewpoints, not always with due impartiality and a thorough knowledge of the facts.

It gives a new explanation for the origin of caste and untouchability, dating it back to the pre-Indian past of the Aryans and Dravidians. It contributes greatly to a better knowledge of the Harijans by a short description and characterisation of all the individual Harijan castes throughout India. Such a study had never been undertaken before.

This study of the Harijans has enabled the author to arrive at new conclusion hitherto rarely mentioned in the literature on caste and untouchability: 1 The problem of untouchability originated among the high castes. Therefore, for the abolition of untouchability, the high-castes must be tackled first. They must be convinced that untouchability is to their own economic and social disadvantage. So far reformers have attacked the problem at the wrong end: by trying to "uplift" the Harijans. No wonder they failed. 2 The Indian high-castes are not consistent in linking untouchability with certain "impure" occupations. The stigma of untouchability is attached to certain trades in one region, while in other regions workers in the same trade are not excluded from the Hindu fold. 3 Various trades, ritually pure and impure, are closely connected in Indian economy. This explains why certain trades, though apparently ritually pure, yet can be carried out only by untouchables. •

The conclusions presented in the present book may have important practical implications for the abolition of untouchability and thus for the solution of a national problem which causes so much political unrest and untold suffering to vast masses of the Indian population, at the same time blackening the fair image of the Indian nation in the world. •





AT THE BOTTOM OF
INDIAN SOCIETY
The Harijan and other Low Castes



TO THE HONORABLE
MEMBERS OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

At the Bottom of Indian Society

The Harijan and other Low Castes

1304

Stephen Fuchs



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Preface

This present book is intended as a companion volume to my earlier publication *The Aboriginal Tribes of India* which was published in the year 1975.

It must be admitted that this book is the product of library research rather than a field study of all Harijan communities in India. It would have been beyond the capabilities of a single person to visit all the different Harijan communities, even for a superficial study of their present situation. But I may claim that during my long stay in India—since 1934—I have always been much interested in Harijans and have followed events concerning them with intense interest. I have also been able to meet many of them personally on my frequent journeys throughout India. My book *The Children of Hari* and several articles on Harijan castes are sufficient proof of my continuous interest in them. *The Children of Hari*, a monograph of the Nimar Balahis in Madhya Pradesh, published in 1950 in Vienna, is one of the first comprehensive scientific studies of a Harijan caste in India.

This present book deliberately omits the description of the economic exploitation and social degradation of the Harijans. Publications on these topics are redundant. But so far no author has given an enumeration and short characterisation of all the innumerable Harijan castes. For though they are called "casteless", they have graded themselves into many castes, and even to the present day maintain a caste hierarchy of their own making. In the observance of their social distinctions the Harijans are often more rigorous than the higher Hindu castes.

In this book the Harijan castes are arranged not geographically, but occupationally. This was done for a practical reason: to avoid undue repetition in their description, and also to show the difference in treatment of the various occupations by the higher castes.

I am quite aware of the fact that my description of the various Harijan castes is often quite inadequate and superficial. But this could not be avoided, for a fuller description of each individual caste would have made the book too bulky. For the same reason I had often to

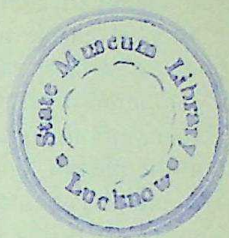
omit special modifications to general statements. Nor was it possible to give for each statement in the text the exact source of information. A bibliography of the relevant literature on Harijans is given at the end of the book, but I had to omit mentioning the numerous articles and news items in newspapers and magazines which I had collected on these topics during the many years of my stay in India.

For some Harijan communities no up-to-date information was available and I had to fall back on rather old descriptions of the same. Yet from my general knowledge of the Harijans all over India I am fairly sure that in general the situation of each Harijan caste has been recorded much as it exists today.

Students of Indian sociology and anthropology might be interested in this description of the many different Harijan communities as presented in this book. It opens to them a vast field of yet unstudied and so far much neglected Indian societies for scientific research. Politicians and social workers might also benefit by a perusal of this book; it might give them a deeper insight into the immensely complex and so deeply rooted problem of over eighty million Indian citizens, at the bottom of Indian society. And it should convince all unprejudiced readers of the book that the Harijans belong to the same human race as the other castes and communities in India, that they do not belong to an entirely different world forever and irrevocably separated from the higher Hindu castes. They are human beings with a similar physical and mental constitution, with similar needs and ambitions, with equal talents and capabilities, which would enable them to assume an honoured place in Indian society, once the stigma of untouchability is taken from them and they are granted the basic human rights which so long have been denied to them in such a categorical and cruel manner.

Bombay
1 September, 1981

Stephen Fuchs



Introduction

Compact classless societies, unless very primitive, are rare in the world. Almost all more developed societies have a hierarchy of social status and rank for their members. Some of them are very complicated social structures with a highly developed class-consciousness in its members. At the bottom of such societies are often human groups which are called Pariahs (from Parayan, a large low-caste in South India). Such Pariah groups are found in many societies all over the world, living in similar situations, with a similar mental outlook and treated in similar manner by their superiors. Thus the existence of such Pariah groups is not restricted to India, though only in India has social discrimination developed into the very peculiar and truly unique caste system.

Max Weber identified Pariah groups more or less with guest residents and defined them "as underprivileged social groups who, though their occupations were economically indispensable for their host societies were nevertheless treated as "impure" and consequently ritually avoided. For this reason they were obliged to live as unsteady wanderers, or as people forcibly restricted to settling only on the fringe of cities, towns and villages. Often they were aliens who were refused admittance into a closely knitted society."

These Pariah groups are treated as inferior and devoid of human rights because they are outsiders, aliens, of different race and culture, often they are regarded as less than human. They live on the fringe of the society, often excluded from social contact with its members though their services are accepted as highly valuable and often necessary for the survival of the host society.

Examples of such Pariah groups are the blacksmiths of Arabia, Somaliland and in certain animal-breeding societies of East Africa, the Pygmy tribes in central and southern Africa, a section of the

Arioi Society in Tahiti, the South American Maku. In past centuries the Jews of medieval Europe, and the shepherds in Germany were treated as Pariahs, later the Negroes of North America, the Blacks and Coloured in South Africa, the aborigines of Australia, the Yetas of Japan, and in modern times the Jews in Nazi Germany, to some extent the present "guest-workers" in Europe, the so-called dissidents in Communist countries, a.o. are such Pariahs.

The largest Pariah population is no doubt found in India. It forms about one-fifth of the whole population. Officially these Pariah groups are comprised under the heading 'Scheduled Castes.' These castes go under various names, such as 'Untouchables,' 'Harijans' (a glorified term, coined by Narasimha Mehta and adopted and popularised by Mahatma Gandhi), 'Exterior Castes' (as called by J.H. Hutton), 'Depressed Classes, (by British officials), 'Outcastes,' 'Pariahs' (commonly, but doubtfully derived from the Tamil word *paṛa* or *paṛai*, the drum). In more ancient times the terms 'Mlechha,' 'Chandala' (Manu), also Panchama (the fifth class), Avarna (i.e., outside the four *varṇas*), Nishada, Paulkasa, Antyaja, Atishudra etc., were used.

The term 'Scheduled Castes' appeared for the first time in the Government of India Act 1935. In April 1935, the British Government issued the Government of India (Scheduled Caste) Order 1936, specifying certain castes, races and tribes as Scheduled Castes. Prior to that these population groups were generally known as 'Depressed Classes.' The test applied for inclusion in the list was the social, educational and economic backwardness arising out of historical customs of untouchability.

In the Government of India Act 1935, a reference is made to the 'Backward Tribes.' The first serious attempt to list 'Primitive Tribes' was, as in the case of the Depressed Classes, made at the Census of 1931. The primitive or 'Scheduled Tribes' were tabulated as such because they were living in remote and inaccessible hills and forests; they were ethnically different from the rest of the Indian population, generally followed old modes of agriculture and were reluctant to have social dealings with outside peoples. They had their own set of deities and rituals of worship. They did not observe the same taboos and prejudices of food and occupation as the Hindus. These tribes, on account of their primitiveness and aloofness, remained backward in many ways and therefore needed protection and assistance.

The 'Scheduled Castes' on the other hand, desire incorporation in

the Hindu society, but are rejected by the Hindus because of their ritual 'impurity' and for certain peculiar objectionable habits and occupations. They have, in spite of their rejection, almost completely abandoned their own original culture—if ever they possessed such a culture—and have adopted the culture of the superior Hindu castes. They are backward, underprivileged and oppressed not because of their racial and cultural aloofness, but because the superior Hindu society rejects them and wants to have no social contact with them. This is an important distinction between the 'Scheduled Castes' and the 'Scheduled Tribes.'

According to the Census of India 1971 the number of the 'Scheduled Castes' population is nearly eighty millions (79, 995, 896) or 14.6 per cent of the total population. Their increase rate is higher than that of the other classes of the Indian population, for in 1961 they formed only 13.7 and in 1941 only 12.75 per cent of the total population. Many experts believe that even these figures are too low and that they form almost 20 per cent of the Indian population. The dividing line between the Harijans and the impure Shudra castes, equally backward and under-privileged, is fluctuating. Moreover, many members of the 'Scheduled Castes' do not like to reveal their identity to the Census officers.

The members of the 'Scheduled Castes' are mainly a rural population. Only 10.2 per cent of them live in an urban environment. But they are not really of peasant stock; they lack a farmer's mentality and appear to be rather village artisans.

Economically completely dependent on the superior classes and much exploited by them, socially degraded and treated with contempt, deliberately deprived of the higher religious and cultural values of Hindu society, they all suffer from a varying degree of ritual impurity. Close contact with them is polluting; they are 'untouchables'.

1. The Nature of Untouchability

In essence, the 'untouchables' are excluded from the society of the Hindu castes. They are rejected by Hindu society though, in general, the 'untouchables' are anxious to conform to the laws and regulations of Hindu society and want to be integrated in it. But ancient Hindu law has forbidden all social contact with the untouchables. Hindus should not associate with them, marry nor even have casual

sex relations with them. They are debarred from Hindu temples and places of worship, from the celebration of feasts, offerings and sacrifices. They should be kept in ignorance of the higher religious values of Hinduism, of the tenets and truths of the sacred scriptures. Manu decreed that a Chandala should be punished severely if he only listened to the recital of the sacred scriptures.

No member of a Hindu caste may accept cooked food, salt, milk or water from an untouchable. His touch is polluting, even his nearness is often sufficient to defile a man of high caste. In some cases even his sight is polluting. He is debarred from using all public conveniences, roads, vehicles, ferries, wells, schools, restaurants and tea shops.

Brahmins should not perform religious rites for him, nor should barbers, water-carriers, washermen, tailors serve them if they serve Hindus.

An untouchable has no rights, only the duty to submit to any order and any kind of treatment by the members of the Hindu castes. He is mercilessly exploited, socially degraded and humiliated, forced to live in squalor and unhealthy surroundings, often deprived of the essential human necessities. He is taught to accept his lot without any murmur, as the fruit of his *karma*, the results of his misdeeds in a former life which he can atone only by a patient and uncomplaining acceptance of his present state.

The situation of the untouchables has changed much for the better in modern times. Distance pollution is no more practised, public conveniences are only partly denied them, and many agencies extend economic and moral assistance to them. But the basic disabilities still prevail, and the untouchables themselves still suffer from mental and moral defects resulting from their social degradation. In many places where they try to assert their human rights they are put down by the caste Hindus, and many atrocities are committed to instil fear in them and to exterminate any hope in them for an improvement of their lot.

The Harijan problem is not so much a problem of the Harijans but rather a problem of the caste Hindus. For they have created the Harijans. The Harijans themselves are very eager to be assimilated by Hindu society, but they are consistently rejected by the caste Hindus. Those who work for the abolition of untouchability must consequently mainly concentrate on a change of heart of the high castes. The caste Hindus must be enlightened and must be convinced

that their attitude towards the so-called Harijans is wrong, harmful to themselves and to the whole Indian nation; that untouchability is unjust, unreasonable and unwarranted. Social and economic uplift of the Harijans is necessary and beneficial, no doubt, but it does not touch the root of the evil. Even revolts of the Harijans will have no lasting effects, for they can always be suppressed.

The traditional caste people of India fear that the whole age-old order of Indian society will be upset and destroyed if untouchability goes and the low castes are treated as equals. They are still convinced that powerful and valid religious, social and economic reasons exist for the continuance of the caste system and untouchability. It must be proved to them convincingly that these reasons are no longer valid and that a change of the old social structure of Indian society is inevitable and even beneficial to them too. Only then will they be ready to change their attitude towards the Harijans and low castes.

It appears that the problem of untouchability has not been tackled sufficiently from this side. Reformers have always concentrated too exclusively on the plight of the Harijans and sought to help and to "uplift" them. There is too much paternalism hidden in this attitude.

India could learn much from the history of the abolition of slavery. The psychology behind both these phenomena seems much similar. The history of the abolition of slavery therefore can teach us how the problem of untouchability should be tackled. For slavery has completely and without a trace been abolished in some countries of the West, while its evil consequences still linger on in some other countries, as for instance in southern North America and in South Africa. Similarly untouchability persists still in India, in spite of its official abolition. The problem must be tackled from the side of those who created the problem and who have a strong interest in its survival and less from the side of the victims of untouchability.

The fact should not be ignored that the low castes and even the Harijans practise untouchability. If possible they are even worse perpetrators than the higher castes. No human being wants to be at the bottom of human society. And the lowest man, in order to retain a shred of his self-respect, desires to look down on some other human being and at least pretend that the other man is still a little lower! And since he clings desperately to this superiority, whether real or only pretended, he may be even more intolerant towards other castes or

non-castes than high-caste people would be. This attitude can only be changed, once the pressure from above ceases and low castes everywhere are treated as equals, when personality alone counts and not birth and membership in a particular caste or community.

The history of Indian society is full of attempts by reformers to abolish or at least mitigate the rigours of the caste system and of untouchability. These reforms were often promoted by members of the higher and even the highest castes. Sometimes reforms were demanded by members of the Harijan castes themselves. Even violent revolts took place. But they could easily be suppressed. Moreover, the low castes and outcastes were never united. Each reformer lived and worked mainly for his own caste. Even Ambedkar restricted his agitation to the Mahars the caste to which he belonged.

So far almost all these attempts for an abolition of untouchability have failed. Even a conversion to Islam or the Christian Faith did not succeed to liberate the low castes from their social degradation and economic exploitation. These religions should not be blamed, for untouchability is a disease of the superior castes; *they* have to be cured of it. It is up to them to grant the Harijans the same human rights which they claim for themselves as their birth-right. They must be convinced that it is to their own advantage if they allow the Harijans all facilities to come up as full-fledged members of the Indian nation. And it is indeed a heavy price the superior castes have to pay for having a fifth of the whole population around their neck holding them back on the road to prosperity and a respected place in the commonwealth of nations.

2. *Theories about the Origin of Untouchability in India*

Various theories have been proposed as explanations for the origin of untouchability in India. As it so often happens with human institutions, no single cause can explain untouchability. Various factors have contributed to the growth of a social phenomenon which in this extreme form is found only in India, and particularly in Hindu India. The theories of a few eminent scholars are worth to be discussed in the following pages.

Manu: According to Manu, the ancient Indian law-giver, untouchability is the punishment for a miscegenation, between a member of a high caste and that of a low caste or an outcaste. The children of such an unequal pair become untouchables, and they are the lower

INTRODUCTION

the greater the social gap is between the two parents. Untouchability is also more severe if the mother is of the superior caste. Thus the offspring of a Brahmin father and a Shudra mother is called Nishada; the child becomes a fisherman. The offspring of a Shudra father and a Brahmin mother is called Chandala; he is the most degraded of all mortals.

To Manu a degraded occupation is not the cause of untouchability, rather untouchability condemns a person to a low and impure occupation. Curiously Manu considered carpentry to be the lowest occupation and assigned it to the offspring of a Shudra father and a Vaishya mother.¹ But in the course of time the attitude changed and a low occupation or a defiling calling reduced the worker to various degrees of untouchability. In later times the element of racial mixture was added as a factor of impurity; according to Manu miscegenation occurred between members of different social rank, while they belonged to the same Aryan race and culture. In the time after Manu the members of the lower castes belonged in increasing numbers to different races and cultures.

A modern instance for the low social status of the offspring of mixed caste unions and illegitimate birth is that of the Ilamagans in Madurai District. It is alleged that they are the illegitimate offspring of Vellala fathers and Vallamban mothers or, according to another version, of Vellalas and Pallis or, after a third version, they are the descendants of outcasted Valayans, Kallar or Maravar. Though a cultivating caste, the Ilamagans are due to their illegitimate birth of low social status and on par with the Kallar. Brahmins do not perform religious rites for them. They are, however, not a defiling caste though they eat pork, fowls and fish, bury their dead and allow widow remarriage.

A similar caste is that of the Shindes in Maharashtra. The caste has always been and is still recruited from the illegitimate children of the upper class Hindus. In former times the Shindes were the domestic slaves of the higher castes; now they are the cooks and housemaids and nursery-maids of wealthy families.

J.H.Hutton: This eminent anthropologist, author of the best recent book on caste, *Caste in India*, believes in a ritualistic origin for untouchability. In his opinion untouchability is the consequence of ritual impurity. He says: "The origin of the position of the exterior castes is part-

¹Manu, X, 6-40

ly racial, partly religious, and partly a matter of social custom. There can be little doubt but the idea of untouchability originates in taboo. Reminiscences of such a taboo are still to be seen in Burma, where grave-digging is a profession involving a social stigma of a kind which will not permit of association with persons of other professions. A comparison of this custom with the position of those who dig graves for the hill tribes in the surrounding areas leaves little doubt that the repulsion originates in the fear of some sort of death infection, and the underlying idea is not that the person himself is polluted by unclean work but that his mere association with death may infect others with whom the grave-digger comes into contact with the probability of dying.

The treatment of washermen all over India as a depressed caste is almost certainly traceable to a similar taboo, the objection perhaps arising from an association with the menstrual clothes of women and consequently an infection which, in the first instance, is magical, though it later comes to be regarded merely as a matter of personal cleanliness.

The untouchability which has originated in taboo has undoubtedly been accentuated by differences of race and the racial antipathies which seem common in every branch of the human family and have reinforced the magical taboo. An instance of this sort of thing may again be found in Burma, which, as there is there no caste in the Indian sense, is useful as providing indications of the process of caste formation. Here pagoda slaves, the status of whom is hereditary are looked down upon by other classes. In general, pagoda slaves have been recruited from non-Burmese races. Large numbers of Arakanese, Talaings, Manipuris, and Siamese have been settled in various parts of Burma by various conquering monarchs as slaves of different pagodas.

This racial element is probably to be traced again in the prohibition of the wearing of ornaments by certain castes. Thus in the Ao tribe in the Naga Hills of Assam one of the subtribal groups, which is apparently of different origin to the rest of the tribe, is not allowed to wear ivory on both arms. Similar restrictions are found on the Laccadive Islands.

The same element probably appears in the practice of hypergamy, and the first step which any section of an exterior caste takes in order to raise its social standing is to deny to other sections the right to marry daughters though continuing, for the time being, to take

wives from them. Thus have the Haliya Kaibartta severed themselves from the Jalia Kaibartta and established themselves as a separate caste, no longer depressed, and even so a section of the Namasudra is now attempting to segregate itself. Indeed as between different sections of the exterior castes prejudice is just as strong as between the interior castes and the exterior castes generally. The Mahar in Bombay have objected to sharing their counsels and conferences with Chamars, and Mahar and Chamar have unanimously spurned the Bhangi. Similarly, in Madras Pallans have objected to being classed with Chakli whom they regard as no less inferior to them than the Parayan, though all alike are untouchables to a good caste Hindu.

Religion, of course, with its apparatus of holy vessels, sacred animals and sacrosanct priests, has also contributed to the creation of the idea of untouchability; and society in general by its natural dislike of certain unclean occupations and by its very proper antipathy to criminal professions has done much to depress and stereotype the position of the exterior castes."¹

C. von Fürer-Haimendorf: This anthropologist believes that untouchability is an urban development and is the result of an unclean and ritually impure occupation. He writes in the Foreword to my book *The Children of Hari* (Vienna, 1950, VI-IX) as follows:

"Sooner or later the historical position of the depressed classes will have to be clarified. The theory that the untouchables are the descendants of an original population conquered by later invaders and subsequently reduced to the status of serfs and menials is no longer tenable, though in individual cases political conquest or economic domination may have relegated a tribal population to the rank of an untouchable caste. But we have only to compare the overall socio-economic position of the aboriginal tribes and that of the depressed classes to realize the weakness of this theory, which incidentally is responsible for the designation Adi-Hindu (original Hindu) used in parlance as a euphemism for depressed classes.

If the untouchables were the remnants of a submerged autochthonous population one would expect them to differ radically in physical make-up from the dominant castes, while having affinities to those aboriginal populations which have retained their ethnic individuality. But anthropometric evidence does not support this view. Although in some areas the depressed classes stand racially between

¹J. H. Hutton, 1951, 206-7.

the highest Hindu castes and the aboriginal forest tribes, on the whole the racial association between the untouchables and the local Hindu castes is much closer than that between untouchables and aboriginals.

In the Telugu-speaking parts of the Deccan, for instance, the depressed castes of the Madigas and Malas are of a physical type no less progressive than that prevailing among the local cultivating castes, whereas the aboriginal tribes of Chenchus, Konda Reddis and Koyas are unmistakably of more primitive type.

Similarly the Doms of the United Provinces, who stand on the lowest rung of the social ladder, resemble racially some of the highest castes. This has recently been emphasized by D.N. Majumdar in a discussion of the correlation between race and social status. "The Dravidian theory" writes Majumdar, "places the Dom alongside the tribal groups but on anthropometric and serological evidence this is difficult to uphold. On the one hand the Dom approach the Kshatriya in stature, sitting height and other characters, on the other they show close relation with the Chamar... Whatever be the cultural status of the Dom,...their dissociation from the tribal groups...is definitely established."¹ The physical similarities between the untouchables and the higher castes of the same locality suggest, if not common ancestry, at least an association sufficiently ancient to have led to a harmonization of types through miscegenation over a fairly extensive period of time.

The economic and occupational position of the depressed classes is equally irreconcilable with the hypothesis of their descent from an older autochthonous people conquered by the ancestors of the present caste-Hindus. Such a population would have consisted mainly of cultivators, and there is no apparent reason why their fate should have been different from such agricultural tribes as Gonds, Mundas or Santals in areas where the aboriginals are now dominated by more dynamic populations. But it is only in certain parts of Southern India that the Untouchables are mainly agrestic serfs. Elsewhere they have no particularly close connection with the soil, but on the contrary are craftsmen such as leather workers and weavers or menials working as messengers, watchmen or sweepers. Indeed it is difficult to envisage the development of untouchability in a society of cultivators. In villages, where nearly everyone is engaged

¹D. N. Majumdar, 1949, p. 149.

in agriculture, there is comparatively little difference in the standards of living of the wealthy and the poor, and even slaves usually share their masters' habitations and meals. None of the tasks performed in the pursuit of agriculture is likely to appear particularly distasteful to a villager, and it is therefore unlikely that any one set of people would be shunned by other villagers on account of their occupation.

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But in a town, however small, conditions are different. Here the wealthier citizens, engaged perhaps in trade, the organization of government and the management of larger estates easily attain a level of culture and sophistication which sets them apart from the ordinary manual labourer. The poorer classes, on the other hand, are likely to live in squalor such as is seldom found in a rural environment. Where their occupation, such as the dressing and tanning of hides, added to the unhygienic conditions of their quarters, the upper classes may well have felt a certain revulsion to close physical contact and this may have resulted in the banishment of people of such 'unclean' occupations to the outskirts of the settlements. In a society where personal cleanliness is largely identified with ritual purity and the idea of pollution is as highly developed as among the dominant Hindu castes, the 'unclean' occupations of certain menial classes would obviously have excluded them from participation in many ritual activities. They and their work would have seemed not only repugnant, but fraught with the danger of pollution, and they themselves may gradually have been treated as 'untouchable.' Where the growth of settlements necessitated the employment of scavengers—for whom even today there is no need in any of the smaller Indian villages—these 'untouchables' were the obvious recruits for such menial and unpleasant service. Once untouchability had developed in urban or semi-urban settlements its gradual spread to the villages was inevitable, for it is everywhere the towns which set the standard.

While everything points to an urban origin of untouchability, it is not yet possible to ascribe the growth of this social phenomenon to any definite period in Indian history. It would certainly be tempting to construe a link between the untouchable craftsmen of Dravidian India and an 'industrial' proletariat of the ancient Indus towns, whose ultimate break-up might even account for the dispersal of 'untouchables' throughout other parts of India, but such a hypothesis would be little more than speculation.

That certain aboriginal tribes, particularly in Southern India, have

been reckoned among the depressed classes and, following the loss of their economic freedom, have sunk to the level of untouchables, shall not be denied. But on the whole it is not the aboriginal's standing outside the caste-system who suffer from the most severe social disabilities, but the depressed classes who for centuries have lived in closest association with caste-Hindus. Many aboriginals eat beef and follow other habits objectionable to Hindus without being treated as untouchable, whereas members of depressed classes cannot gain admittance to Hindu society even though they may personally abandon such customs.

Were the untouchables really the descendants of a conquered, aboriginal population, certainly their impurity and low social status would be shared by those aboriginals least assimilated to Hindu civilization. But the contrary is true, and the aboriginal cultivator, be he Gond or Munda, looks down upon the untouchable in the same manner as does any caste-Hindu. Very rarely do we find aboriginals and members of depressed classes living side by side as cultivators of equal status, as one would expect them to do if the untouchables were the descendants of an old agricultural population subjected by the more advanced Hindu castes. Wherever untouchables do live in symbiosis with aboriginals they are considered new-comers of a low social status.

More factual material on the depressed classes than is available at present will have to be gathered before we can advance any comprehensive theory regarding the origin of the untouchable castes of India."

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Dr. Ambedkar's thesis on the origin of untouchability, as expounded in his book *The Untouchables* (New Delhi, 1948) is an altogether novel one. It contains the following propositions:

1. There is no racial difference between the Hindus and the untouchables.
2. The distinction between the Hindus and the untouchables in its original form, before the advent of untouchability, was the distinction between Tribesmen and Broken Men from alien tribes. It is the Broken Man who subsequently came to be treated as untouchable.
3. Just as untouchability has no racial basis so also it has no occupational basis.
4. There are two roots from which untouchability has sprung:

- (a) Contempt and hatred of the Broken Man, as of Buddhism by the Brahmins.
 - (b) Continuation of beef-eating of the Broken Men after it had been given up by the others.
5. In searching for the origin of untouchability care must be taken to distinguish the Untouchable from the Impure. All orthodox Hindu writers have identified the Impure with the Untouchable. This is an error. Untouchables are distinct from the Impure.
 6. While the Impure as a class came into existence at the time of the Dharma Sutras, the Untouchables came into being much later than 400 AD.

On p. 29 of his book Dr. Ambedkar tries to explain what he means by Broken Men. He proposes an ingenious hypothesis: When primitive society began to settle down and to cultivate, certain tribes remained nomadic and warlike. They began to attack the settled tribes as the latter were wealthier. In addition they had grain which the nomads did not possess but wanted. The settled men needed defenders as they had lost their warlike spirit. They employed 'broken men'—defeated nomads, stray individuals who needed protection and shelter. They became mercenaries of the settlers, but were not allowed to stay within the settlement. They were kept at a distance, as they belonged to a different tribe. They were treated with disrespect, as 'broken men' and as mercenaries.

Dr. Ambedkar tried to provide supporting evidence from Ireland and Wales. But while in these countries the outsiders were after nine generations absorbed in the settled community, this did not happen in India. For the Hindus had contempt for the broken men who were Buddhists and beef-eaters.

At first sight this theory may seem rather far-fetched. But there is certainly an element of truth in it. It is a well-known fact that the nomadic animal breeders of Inner Asia, for example, enjoyed nothing more than raiding and fighting. When a tribe was defeated and routed, the survivors often used to be sold into slavery by their conquerors. Those who managed to escape had to seek the protection of another tribe. Being powerless they had often to content themselves with menial jobs, tending horses and cattle, making and repairing saddles and other leather-work, such as tongs and bridles, making and cleaning weapons, etc. As these animal breeding nomads generally despised menial and manual work, this contempt was also extended to those who had to perform it. There was thus a deep social cleavage

between the masters and their servant class, though racially and culturally they did not differ much.

It was different with other survivors of a defeated tribe, those who had to seek the protection of a settlement of cultivators. They were readily accepted and employed by the cultivators as watchmen and defenders of their property and lives, since the cultivators were unable to defend themselves. In payment for their services the warriors received their daily food from their employers, a stipulated amount of grain in the harvest season, and all the carcasses of cattle which, as former animal breeders, they had been in the habit of eating. They were not allowed to stay in the settlement, but were kept outside, as guards and soldiers, but also as a distinct race and with different customs and beliefs. Close social contact between the cultivators and their mercenaries was discouraged.

Harsh treatment of outsiders was a common feature in early societies, as it is still in primitive social groups. A stranger is an enemy until he can prove his good intention. Stray defenceless outsiders were often attacked and killed, or enslaved and exploited, at least shunned and kept at a distance. This might have given rise to untouchability in those early settlements where the watchmen and defenders lived outside the settlements, followed their own way of living and their own customs.

Dr. Ambedkar, himself a Mahar, found the confirmation for his theory in the life of his own community: the Mahars were and still are the watchmen in the villages of Maharashtra; they collect their food daily from the houses of the cultivators; they receive a fixed amount of grain at harvest time, and they have the duty of removing the carcasses of cattle from the village. In former times they also fed on the flesh of dead cattle, tanned the hides or sold them to the leather-workers.

Dr. Ambedkar believes that the root cause of untouchability lies in a pronounced cultural or racial difference coupled with a close economic dependence of the inferior society on the superior one. Dr. Ambedkar might be right in his distinction between untouchability and ritual impurity. The consequences of both phenomena may be similar, but the causes are different. This becomes clear from an African parallel in which ritual impurity plays no part whatsoever, but untouchability is shown to be in existence as it is practised in India.

The Mongo-Bokote, a Bantu tribe in the Kasai region of the Congo, practically treat the Batswa Pygmoids as untouchables. They

do not employ them for any work which would necessitate a close social contact with the Batswa. They do not allow them to fetch water from their own wells, nor will they ever use a Batswa vessel for drinking. They do not accept food cooked by a Batswa woman (though they do so from the hands of a Batswa man). They avoid any physical proximity with Batswas. They avoid entering a Batswa settlement, nor do they allow Batswas to enter their houses. When Batswas eat or drink in the presence of Negroes, they must turn their backs towards the Negroes.

A Batswa should not pass through a Negro settlement, but if he must, he should use a back-lane or walk at one extreme side of the road. A Batswa woman must stop on the way-side if a Negro passes her, and she must turn her back towards him.

A Negro feels seriously offended if he is called a Batswa. He considers it an abuse.

In spite of this social distance between the two tribes a strong economic symbiosis exists between a Negro joint family and a Batswa local group. The Batswas hunt for the Negroes and provide them with meat; they work in their gardens and farms, help in the harvesting of the coconuts, assist in house building and in the past even went to war with their Negro clients.

For all these services the head of a Negro joint family has to support his own Batswa group, assist them especially at birth, marriage and death feasts; he has to protect them, punish those who offend or harm a member of his family. If they do something wrong, he punishes them with greater severity than he would punish a member of his own family. It is significant that a Batswa who loses his status in his own community can be enslaved by the Negroes, while a Batswa who is a respected member of a local group living in symbiosis with a Negro joint family cannot be made a slave by any Negro.¹

Similar relations exist between Bushmen and white settlers in South Africa, the Bushmen being, however, at an even greater disadvantage in their dealings with the white settlers than the Batswas with the Negroes.

3. A New Theory about the Origin of Untouchability

The just mentioned theories about the origin of untouchability as

¹H. Loiskandl, 1966.

well as various others presented by a number of Indologists seem to suffer of one defect: they do not penetrate deeply enough into the past of the dominant Indian peoples. They restrict themselves unduly to happenings in India. No doubt, the caste system and untouchability developed after the arrival of the Aryans and, most probably, of the Dravidians in India. The caste system, as it has grown in India, is unique and not found elsewhere in the world. And nowhere in the world are untouchables found in such vast numbers—eighty millions!

Yet, its roots must be sought in an age when both population groups lived in the steppes of Inner Asia. In this wide region, especially south of the Altai mountains, the probable home of the Dravidians,¹ a peculiar culture developed several thousand years BC. Its economy concentrated on the domestication and breeding of animals in large herds. These herders gave up cultivation completely and regarded manual work of any kind as unworthy for a shepherd and warrior.

They also developed a social structure of their own: an extended joint family system with a patriarch at its head in whom all power was vested. The patriarch ruled with an iron hand over the members of his often very large household. He owned all the property, the grazing grounds, the large herds numbering often thousands of animals, and he supervised the tending of the herds and all the work connected with it.

Some extended joint families developed into tribes and the patriarchs into chiefs with almost divine powers. Such tribes took on a strong feudal character, some of the families belonging to nobility, others to the rank of mere commoners, and there were families which had suffered misfortune and loss of their herds, through nature catastrophes, epidemics or through raiding; such families needed the help and protection of the more fortunate families and thus became their dependents. Animal breeding societies thus developed a pronounced hierarchical structure.

Concentrating on the tending of the herds, and their defence against robbers and enemies, and organising raids themselves, these animal breeders developed a fierce warrior spirit while on the other hand they despised manual work as degrading. All manual work that had to be done was assigned either to slaves or to craftsmen of other race and culture. In their frequent raids and fights the animal breed-

¹K.H. Menges, 1977, 129-79.

ers occasionally managed to make captives. These they turned into slaves. But persons who had committed a crime or debtors who failed to pay up could also be enslaved, and in time of famine whole families sold themselves into slavery in order to survive. These slaves had to carry out all the menial work which the free men refused to do. Yet these slaves, being of the same race, could be liberated and re-admitted into the community. They were not treated as aliens.

The attitude of the animal breeders was different towards craftsmen of other race and culture. Such people attached themselves to shepherd societies ready to serve and thus gain sustenance and protection. They performed the manual work which required special skills, the work of a blacksmith, for instance, or that of a leather-worker, a weaver or potter. These artisans were often also good musicians, singers and dancers and were invited to entertain their masters.

But in spite of their usefulness the craftsmen were not only despised for their manual service, they were also socially segregated. They had to live at some distance and were not allowed to build their huts near the tents of the animal breeders; intermarriage with them was strictly forbidden. Until this day this attitude towards artisans prevails among members of herding communities in Asia and Africa.

There is sufficient evidence to prove that the Aryans as well as the Dravidians on their arrival in India still belonged to such an animal breeding culture. They must have brought along also their aversion to manual work and to foreign people. The Aryans, on their slow advance through northern India, and the Dravidians wandering down along the west coast into South India, encountered on their way a multitude of earlier settlers who either submitted passively to their conquest or were defeated in fierce battles. As conquerors they managed to impose many of their cultural values and prejudices on the subject peoples of India. Adding a new dimension to their inherited attitude to manual work and racial purity, namely that of ritual, purity, they gradually developed this unique Hindu caste system which ideologically is intimately connected with the concept of untouchability.

4. Untouchability among Arabian and African Herders

Social and racial discrimination is quite common in Arabia. The Bedouin camel breeders of Arabia are by their cultural standards divided into two different sections: while the Bedouins in southern

Arabia are more primitive and simple, with small herds, a simple social structure, men and women tending their animals and doing all the work without servants, the camel herdsman of northern Arabia are more sophisticated. They are camel-riding warriors, their leaders boasting of noble birth, with large herds tended by their dependents and slaves. Manual work is considered with aversion, and any occupation except trade is regarded as degrading, especially iron work and fishing. The superior camel herders abhor fishing and refuse to eat fish. This is an old taboo; Arab geographers mention it already in the Middle Ages.

Besides the superior camel-riding warrior tribes and the inferior and more primitive camel herders with small animal holdings, there is a third class formed by slaves and craftsmen. Any work which requires contact with decaying things, with fish and dirt, the cleaning of flax, the fanning and pounding of grain, the work of a smith or weaver, carrying loads, and the art of entertaining others, buffonry, are regarded as degrading and left to slaves and non-Bedouins. The only noble occupations are the tending of camels and horses, raiding and warfare. Domestic work and tending the small animals are duties to be left to womenfolk.

The smiths are the most despised class of people among the Bedouins. Apart from their iron work, they also work in other metals, do carpentry work, tan skins, weave cloths and manufacture pottery; in general they do all the work which the true Bedouins refuse to do. The smiths are also the veterinary doctors for the Bedouins. Some perform even the work of butchers and barbers.

This class of people has to live apart from the higher classes. Some of the smiths have settled down permanently at one place and lead a sedentary life, while others follow the nomadic Bedouin groups from one grazing ground to the other. But if they want to attach themselves to a particular group of Bedouins, they must obtain the permission of the *sheikh* (headman). For the grant of this permission they must do a number of jobs for the *sheikh* free of charge.

The smiths are treated as inferior not only for their degraded kind of occupation, but also for their mixed origin. Their ranks are constantly swelling by persons who for one reason or the other have no chance of survival unless they join the servant class and take up any kind of work, however mean and degrading.

Apart from these occupational groups, certain non-Bedouin tribes may also be included among the Pariahs of Arabia. One such tribe

is that of the Sleb. They have spread over almost all Arabia. Their traditional calling is hunting. Their most important domestic animal is the donkey which they breed. Bedouins, however, despise the donkey and also donkey breeders.

The Sleb live in small groups, often consisting of one single family. They are under the protection of a Bedouin to whom they pay tribute. The Bedouins despise them and refuse to interdine and intermarry with them. They do iron work for the Bedouins. They are a peaceful people and allow themselves to be much exploited by the Bedouins.

Another Pariah tribe is that of the Hitem (Hutaim) who live on the shores of the Red Sea as far as Yemen. They earn their livelihood by fishing, by catching turtles and by pearl-diving. It is the eating of fish which merits them the contempt of the Bedouins, for the camel breeders loathe fish.

They keep small animals, work as blacksmiths, as collectors of naphtha and wood. They are just a little superior in social rank to the Sleb. The Bedouins keep no social contact with the Hitem; marriage with them is prohibited. It is alleged that Hitem women often live as prostitutes. About their origin nothing definite is known.

A third tribe of the same type is that of the Šerārāt. They live in northern Arabia and are camel breeders. They are very poor and go almost naked. Though in their manner of living they differ scarcely from the Bedouins proper, they are treated as Pariahs. They are accused of living in promiscuity for which reason the Bedouins shun them.

The Rawarne are another such Pariah group. They are residents of the region between Hule lake and the Dead Sea. They are mainly cultivators, but also breed buffaloes and catch fish. They have a very dark complexion and may have mixed with former Negro slaves from whom they have inherited also the kinky hair form and thick lips.

Other Pariah tribes in Arabia are the Sahara, the Bautahara and Jeneba, the Bilhaf, the Afar, the Bait ash Shaikh and the Šihuh.

R. von Maltzan describes two more Pariah classes found in South-Yemen, the Achdam and the Shumr. The Achdam (i.e., servants) have low and dirty occupations. They manufacture pots, tan skins, butcher animals and do other impure jobs. They play instruments and provide music on feast days. But they are allowed to enter a mosque though the houses of the Arabs are closed to them. They have to reside outside the Arab settlements.

Still lower in social rank are the Shumr. They are forbidden to

enter a mosque, and they perform the lowest and dirtiest jobs. They remove dead animals from the dwellings and are said to eat carrion. They do scavenger work and often earn their livelihood as singers and dancers. Dancing is especially the profession of Shumr women. Their morality appears to be low.

Though all these tribes are today Mohammedans, they are treated as Pariahs. This suggests the conclusion that their social degradation is pre-Islamic, for Islam does not permit social discrimination. Only unbelievers are regarded as outcasts. This is probably the reason why the Jews are shunned and forbidden entry into the house or tent of the Bedouins. They are outsiders and unbelievers.

The Shumr, however, are never accepted by the Bedouins as equals, even if they would assume a respectable occupation. They are outcasts by birth, not so much by occupation. In compensation for their social degradation, they are not asked to pay any taxes.

It appears that among the Bedouins of Arabia social discrimination is of high age. It may very well have existed also among the Vedic Aryans at the time of their arrival in India. This would well explain why blacksmiths, weavers, tanners, fishermen and potters are regarded as low castes, even untouchables.

As among the low castes of India, the Pariah classes in Arabia also insist on rank among themselves. Thus the Achdam take great care that the Shumr do not claim the same rights which they enjoy. They want to feel superior to the Shumr.

As the Bedouins of Arabia, the animal breeding tribes of north and East Africa too treat blacksmiths as outcasts and untouchables. This is much in contrast to the treatment smiths receive from the Negro agriculturists. The latter show great respect for blacksmiths. But the shepherd races of Africa generally treat blacksmiths with great contempt.

Thus in Tibesti in the Sahara the blacksmiths of the Teda tribe are of very low social rank. They appear to be ethnically and linguistically different from the Teda tribe. They are strikingly negroid and obviously belonged originally to a cultivating tribe, while the Tedas are camel breeding nomads.

The social rank of the Teda smiths is very low, lower than that of the slaves even. To call a Teda "Doodi" (smith), is considered a very offensive abuse and calls for the fine of one to eight goats. The functions of the Teda smith are: to manufacture iron objects, daggers, knives, agricultural implements; to act as drummers, singers and

dancers for the Tedas; to act as speakers in their meetings; to manufacture pots of clay—a smith woman's job.

Also among the Masais (Hamito-Nilotes) and Shilluks the smith is, in spite of the high quality of his work, the most degraded member of their community. In fact, he is not admitted into their society.

These few illustrations show quite strikingly that untouchability is probably an ancient social trait in animal breeding cultures. It is possible that the Aryans and also the Dravidians brought it along to India when they invaded this sub-continent and settled permanently in the midst of an agrarian village population, with highly skilled artisans. The latter, depending for their livelihood on the sale of their products to the cultivators, could be more easily subjugated and enslaved by the new conquerors from Asia than the farmers on whose supply of grain and other field products even the new lords depended. Thus the artisans became outcastes and untouchables while the cultivators retained a higher social status and greater economic independence.

CHAPTER 1

Untouchability in Tribal India

Untouchability in India is a rather vague term. It has many nuances, phases and degrees. It may prevent a high-caste Hindu from approaching and touching a certain person because his touch defiles him ritually and makes him unfit to perform certain actions and to associate without purification with members of his own society. But certain individuals or social groups may deliberately disassociate themselves and keep aloof of high-caste society, not willing to conform to the ways of living, the prejudices, prohibitions and rules of this society. Here untouchability appears to be reciprocal: the high-caste Hindus keep apart from persons of a certain type, and they in their turn avoid the society of high-caste Hindus. A number of nomadic tribes living dispersed over the whole of India belong to this category of people.

In spite of strenuous efforts by the Indian Government it has not yet been possible to wean them from their unsteady and primitive way of living. They seem to value their freedom too highly to exchange it for a better, but dull life of hard work and monotonous routine.

In the past, when India was less populated and the jungle more extensive, these nomadic foodgatherers and primitive hunters were able to subsist entirely on nature, hunting wild animals for flesh and foraging in forest and open country for vegetarian food. But in present time only a few jungle tribes have this freedom, most tribes are forced to live in a certain kind of symbiosis with the settled population and to stay therefore in the vicinity of villages and towns. For they have acquired certain necessities and luxuries without which they do not wish to live for long. Or they may not be able to subsist throughout the year on what nature offers them and they must at least during certain seasons of the year seek temporary employment in the villages to make up this deficiency.

Thus they sell or barter what they collect in jungle and forest and

acquire in this manner foodstuff, clothing, salt and other condiments, tobacco and liquor and whatever else they desire before they again disappear in the wilderness.

Often they know a man whom they trust and who acts as their agent in these transactions. Their trust is often misplaced and they may be cheated and exploited shamelessly by him, but ignorant of the true market value of their products they are satisfied with the things they receive in exchange and which they really want. They are willing to pay the price which they consider proper for the goods received. Their scale of values differs from that of civilised people.

These vagrant tribes are even according to the standard of Indian villagers very poor, if not destitute. But of course, as nomads they have to reduce their possessions to a minimum because it would encumber their mobility if they had to carry too much along. The more advanced vagrant tribes keep carrier animals and even carts to move their possessions. Some of them have permanent homes in which they keep their goods. They stay at home during the monsoon and the cold season, but the rest of the year they wander around leaving an elderly relative to look after their property.

These nomadic tribes are often held in contempt and social contact with them is avoided because they lead a nomadic life and do not conform to the customs and ways of life of the local population. They are also considered ritually unclean because they eat all kinds of animal's and plants which no reputable villager would touch.

They are despised and treated with aversion because their women-folk are of easy virtue and prostitute themselves for gain. In some tribes all the women are ready to please their customers, while in other tribes a number of girls and women are set aside for this purpose while the rest get married and raise a family. But their sex mores are different from those of the Indian village community; they allow or at least tolerate pre-marital sex relations, practise divorce and widow remarriage. The Indian villagers who have a more puritanical outlook in matters of sex look down on the vagrant tribes as immoral and low.

For still another reason do the villagers shun the vagrant tribes: they, always passionate hunters and foodgatherers, have often by necessity switched over to the exciting game of "foraging" in the fields, villages and towns. They indulge in petty thefts, field and house robberies, cattle-lifting and occasionally even in serious dacoity. Naturally the villagers are not at all pleased when a troupe of such

tribals appears and intends to settle down for some time near the village or town.

These vagrant communities, of tribal origin though now largely Hinduised, are often accused by the villagers of a lack of religious beliefs and practices. They do not take part in communal worship; they have no religious images of their own; they are rarely if ever seen offering sacrifices and celebrating religious feasts. When the villagers celebrate, these nomads are busy entertaining the pilgrims and earning their living in other ways. Indeed, their religious life has been reduced to a minimum; they have lost their old religion and adopted Hinduism in a very imperfect form. They are ignorant of the higher spiritual ideas and values of Hinduism. Thus they are despised as irreligious and ignorant nomads.

These vagrant tribes, foragers, yet semi-dependent on village people, should be distinguished from another type of vagrant communities which are probably of low-caste Hindu or Muslim origin. Their unsteady life is more the outcome of the occupations they follow. There are certain trades catering to rare and occasional needs which cannot be carried out unless those who follow them wander from place to place searching for customers and clients in a comparatively wide area. To these belong the actors of rural theatres, musicians and drummers, jugglers and acrobats, but also travelling craftsmen such as smiths, knife grinders, millstone makers and repairers, basket makers and mat weavers. In India where each trade tends to force those who follow it into a separate caste or at least into an endogamous sub-caste, these occupations are consequently performed by individuals or small groups which have no choice but to lead a wandering life, however sedentary their former way of living might have been. The chance of earning a livelihood in one of these particular trades became by force of the caste system their permanent and established way of life-forcing them to continue their once accepted occupation and thus condemning them to a perpetually unstable life.

There is still a third group of people leading a more or less unsteady life and belonging to the "Criminal Castes", since 1952 classified as "Denotified Castes" or ex-Criminal Castes. They are notorious for their former, and more recent, criminal activities, but have taken to a life of crime for various other reasons than the vagrant foragers. Probably they had been uprooted in the frequent wars fought in the past in India and deprived of earning their livelihood by honest means or, as professional soldiers, found themselves jobless

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after the British had restored order and peace in the country. Unable to earn a living as farmers or artisans, these discarded soldiers often turned criminals. They are thus not primitive foodgatherers, but more likely degraded Rajputs, Jats and members of other martial castes, generally of higher social rank and belonging to a superior cultural category. Even in the pursuance of their criminal activities they display a higher intelligence, more involved techniques and a strong spirit of adventure often coupled with a certain chivalry. Their daring and cunning are obviously far beyond the mental capacity of the simple foodgatherers. In the following these three distinct groups will be discussed in special chapters.

1. Vagrant Tribes

We are concerned here merely with foodgatherers who have partly drifted into petty thieving because there was nothing else left for them to collect and to forage. They are forced by the prevailing adverse circumstances to practise subsistence thieving, that is, taking their minimal daily requirements from the land or its lawful owners: vegetables, grain and fruit for themselves, grass for their animals, and of course the proverbial "stray" chicken. In a general way they consider the entire world a public domain. Stealing is not considered by them a misdemeanour as long as it is limited to the taking of bare necessities, and not in larger quantities than they need for the day.

These tribes are practically aboriginals and primitives, though in their dealings with the castes and peoples of northern India they may have lost to a large extent their tribal character, retaining of it only the nomadic and foraging habit and a great love for complete independence. Their different racial origin is still clearly recognisable though it cannot yet be scientifically defined due to the almost complete absence of anthropometric evidence. Moreover, a large amount of miscegenation has been going on for a long time between these tribes and the local Hindu and Muslim population. They have received a considerable admixture of non-tribal blood owing to the sexually accommodating attitude of their womenfolk. They are generally undersized, dark of complexion, with curiously infantile features and grizzle bodies. It is not impossible that they were originally Negritos.

It can also be seen that sections of these tribes or castes have split off from the original communities and adopted the settled life of villagers, as cultivators or landless fieldhands. Thus the same

caste may have an endogamous section in one region completely settled and leading the ordinary routine life of the villagers, while in another part of the country it is still in the foraging and nomadic stage of culture.

One such caste is that of the Bowariahs, Bawarias or Bauris, a large caste (902, 250 in 1961) spread widely over the plains of northern India from Rajasthan to Bengal, but mainly found in Bengal and Orissa. Most of the Bauris have now settled down to the life of cultivators and field-labourers, but there are a few sections which still earn their living by the noose. Their name derives from *bawar*, the noose, which in the past was much used by them on their hunting expeditions. Other sections, still nomadic, are said to indulge in petty thieving though rarely employing violence. The Bauris are of dark complexion and poor physique.

The north-western sections of the Bauris, in Rajasthan and the Punjab, are no more treated as outcastes and are even served by Brahmins in their religious ceremonies, but the sections along the Jammu and in Bengal are very low in social status and definitely belong to the Scheduled Castes, in particular those that are nomadic and are inclined to petty crime.

They eat all wild animals including the pig, and most of them also eat carrion. Their main deity is a goddess (Devi) to whom they sacrifice goats and even buffaloes. They have reverence for the cow, and cremate their dead and immerse the ashes in the Ganges.

The criminal sections of the caste admit outsiders into their community for a fee and speak a language of their own not understood by outsiders. But it is not a natural language, more a thieves' *patois*.

A similar caste is that of the Thoris (139,101 in 1961) who carry merchandise on pack animals in the hills. They seem to be identical with the Aheris of the Punjab and of Rajasthan. Both castes are vagrant in their habit though if they can find steady employment in some place they are not averse to settling down permanently. In former times they were good hunters and fowlers, who caught and ate wild animals of any kind, pure and impure. They also work in reeds and grass. Nowadays they do field-work, and especially hire themselves out in gangs at harvest time as reapers. But they do any kind of work, cut grass and wood, work on roads, in quarries and in saltpetre. In Rajasthan they are general labourers and out-door servants, even musicians.

Their original home seems to be the region around Bikaner and Jodhpur. In physical appearance they do not differ much from the Bauris but they are more Hinduised. They have no language of their own, worship the ordinary Hindu village deities, cremate their dead and send the ashes to the Ganges, do not keep donkeys nor do they eat beef or carrion. Yet they are regarded as outcastes by the Hindus and not permitted to stay in the village. They must reside outside the village precincts. But Brahmins function at their religious ceremonies.

Those settled permanently near a village are said to be law-abiding and submissive. But the vagrant sections of the caste, without a steady employment, are not to be trusted.

The Aheris too were at least in the past notorious for their well-planned gang-burglaries which they organised and carried out usually at some distance from their homes. They managed quickly to collect a sufficiently large group from various different settlements, and to melt away imperceptibly as soon as the coup was accomplished. In present time they are said to use the railway and plan expeditions far away in Bengal or elsewhere.

The caste has no endogamous or exogamous sections, and the conversion of one of its members to Islam makes no difference to his social status.

The Bahelias (28,892 in 1961) are a similar tribe still much addicted to hunting and bird-catching, though now they are increasingly forced to earn their livelihood as daily labourers or in other menial service. The caste has its main centre in Uttar Pradesh, while in Bengal it merges imperceptibly with the Bawariahs or Bauris.

In Bihar the Bahelias are also known as Bhulas whom Risley regarded as a sub-section of the Dosadhs. But the Bhulas emphatically deny any connection with the Dosadhs; they refuse to interdine with them and consider themselves superior. In Bihar the Bahelias are often identified with the Bedias because both castes were originally hunters. In the West they were classed as a sub-section of the Aherias. In fact, all these tribes and castes are culturally and perhaps also racially related and it is difficult to tell them apart.

In spite of their menial occupations the Bahelias are not regarded as an impure caste in the east, but in Bengal their social status is low. In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar Brahmins perform religious ceremonies for them, as the Bahelias observe the Hindu feasts. But their religious practices are much intermixed with spirit worship and magic. Few Bahelias have embraced Islam.

The sections of the Baheliyas which are still vagrant are insignificant. Most of them have settled down as daily labourers, domestic servants and traders.

The same can be stated of the Mahtams, a former hunting caste in the Sutlej valley, now partly in Pakistan. Only a section of them still live as hunters, all the rest are settled cultivators and field servants. They are hard-working and law-abiding, though a trifle dull. More than half of them have become Sikhs, and of the other half the larger portion has embraced Islam. During the partition they had to migrate to Pakistan.

In the sub-montane tracts of the Punjab, another community bearing the same name can be found. But these Mahtams come from the east and not from Rajasthan as the real Mahtams. This community seems to be an offshoot of the Banjaras who have simply adopted the name of Mahtam without really belonging to this caste. Such changes of caste name happen.

The Changars, an originally vagrant caste coming probably from the Jammu hills, are now spread mainly in the Amritsar region, in Lahore, Ferozepur, Faridkot and Sialkot districts. They use to wander about in search of work, only in the vicinity of large cities do they lead a more settled life. They accept almost any type of work, but are most employed in agriculture, particularly as reapers, while their women generally do sifting and cleaning grain for the grain-dealers.

They are all Mohammedans, and claim that they were converted by Shams Tabriz of Multan. Their women still wear petticoats, but blue ones, not the usual red ones. They speak a dialect of their own.

The Pakhiwaras take their name from the word *pakhi*, which mean 'bird' and also a straw hut. Either meaning would be appropriate for this caste, as the Pakhiwaras live in grass huts and are hunters and fowlers. They are found chiefly in the districts of Amritsar, Multan and especially in Sialkot.

They are all Muslims, but eat vermin and are therefore outcasts. By tradition they catch wild animals of all kinds, but they also sell vegetables. The police regard them with suspicion, and in former times they were treated as a criminal caste and kept under strict supervision.

The Gagrars too are a small caste, for the most part Muslim by religion. They wander about catching and eating small animals and vermin. Their hereditary occupation is the catching, keeping and

applying of leeches. They also make matting and generally work in grass and straw. In some regions they weave the coarse sacking used for bags for pack animals and similar purposes.

Nomadic castes are also the Jhabel or Chabel, probably immigrants from Sindh. They are fishermen and hunters on the river Sutlej.

The Kahals or Mors are another vagrant fishing caste on the Sutlej. They also catch and eat lizards.

The Sahariyas of Bundelkhand and the adjoining tracts are another of the former nomadic tribes. They go under various names, such as Sahariya, Sahar, Sehria Sahariya, Saur, Soar, Sor, or Sosia. In 1961 their number amounted to 208,407. Though they have no tradition of having immigrated from any part of the country into Bundelkhand, their name and origin are commonly traced back to the Savara tribe, now residing in the South Orissan hills. The name Savara was in the past applied by Sanskrit authors to any of the Dasyu tribes in central India. Racially the two tribes seem to be similar, but culturally the Sahariyas of Bundelkhand are different. They do not wander about the country anymore than is necessary to give them a good supply of jungle produce which they sell for their living. They are not averse to petty thefts and an occasional gang robbery. They are Hindus, and worship chiefly the local deities without employing Brahmins for the performance of their rites.

The Rajwars and Musahars of eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar belong to the same category. Their features clearly betray their aboriginal descent. The Rajwars (195,307 in 1961) who have now taken to field cultivation are of slightly higher social rank than the Musahars, and even employ degraded Brahmins for their religious functions. They have largely retained their original social organisation. At present they are mainly field labourers and are of low caste, though some have acquired small holdings as tenants and, since the abolition of landlordism, as owners. According to their own traditions they are related to the Musahars.

It is still under dispute whether the Musahars (1,198,517 in 1961) are descended from the Mundas through the Bhuiyas or from Dravida-speaking tribes through the Cheros. But they are undoubtedly of aboriginal stock. This is proved not only by their physical appearance, but also by their social organisation and their religion.

The Musahars, like many other similar castes, are divided into a settled and Hinduised, and a nomadic section. They derive their name from a curious association with the field rat. They are sup-

posed to possess a hereditary instinct for locating the underground burrows and grain catches of these animals. After each harvest they drive the rats from their homes and take a portion of their grain. But they do not kill the rats and take care to leave them sufficient grain to survive until the next harvest. The relationship is thus symbiotic.

Though the Musahars do not observe the ordinary Hindu restrictions about food and behaviour and have retained much of their original social structure as also much of their old form of worship, they occasionally invite Brahmins to serve at their religious feasts. But for most of their celebrations they do not require any Brahmins as official priests.

The settled Musahars live in villages, do menial jobs and work in the fields as daily labourers, while the nomadic Musahars prefer hunting in the jungles and collecting forest produce and fuel which they sell in the villages. They refuse employment as field labourers.

The cultivating castes of Bihar give an interesting reason for their habit of employing Musahars to watch their crops in the fields, namely, that they are alone able to exorcise the older gods who have been driven away by the plough and resent the intrusion of the alien peasantry. They obviously connect the Musahars with the older gods and thus acknowledge that they are the earlier settlers in the region.

The Musahars are so low in social status that they are placed below the Chamars from whom they accept food. Their impure food habits and in particular their association with field rats may be the reason for their low social status.

More towards the west, in Bihar and in the northern districts of Uttar Pradesh, south of the Jumna, are found the Bhars (196,307) who in their physical appearance also must be descended from a dark aboriginal race. About a hundred years ago they were still of rather unsettled habits. Their favourite occupation was breaking up fresh land. When a village area had been brought fully under cultivation, the Bhars were inclined to abandon it for the nearest jungle and to begin all over with preparing new fields. But in contrast to the Musahars they are a respected Hindu caste because they own the land which they cultivate well.

They have a tradition of former greatness, pointing out many old forts and reservoirs as witnesses of their former independence which they seem to have lost by an invasion of Rajputs who, retreating before the onslaught of the Muslim armies occupied the land of the Bhars.

They enjoy now a comparatively high social status and employ Brahmins as official priests while in former times they had priests of their own community. But many of them who are landless must work as fieldhands.

One other tribe of probable former aboriginal type is settled in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal, the Bagdis (1,096,805). Their features and dark complexion betray their aboriginal origin. It is however not possible to assign them to any particular racial group. The Bagdis speak the dialects of the regions in which they reside. Their religion is a mixture of orthodox Hinduism and tribal spirit worship which sets them into the vicinity of the Oraons whose gods they share. They are served by priests of their own caste.

Another proof of their aboriginal origin is their totemic clan system. Most of them are landless field labourers. They accept food from all Hindu castes. They also work as porters, dam builders and fuel collectors.

The Lodhas (43,268) in West Bengal and Bihar also claim descent from the Savaras. They speak a mixture of Bengali, Oriya and Mundari and are mainly nomadic foodgatherers in the jungle tracts of Midnapur. In the plains their occupation is field labour. They have exogamous totemic clans and in eight of the enumerated nine clans they observe rules of avoidance of the totem. Two instances of mourning for the dead totem by bathing and throwing away earthen pots are recorded.

The Lodhas have the reputation of a criminal tribe. It is obvious that economic necessity has brought them to this state. They are mainly a foodgathering community though a section of them has recently taken to agriculture. The forests in which the Lodhas live have been almost denuded of game by the cultivating Hindu castes in need of fields. The Lodhas being attached to their jungle life continued to collect jungle produce and to hunt and trap game, but could not support themselves anymore in the thinned-out forests. Other forests became private property and hunting and collecting in these forests was suddenly declared a crime.¹

A similar tribe is that of the Turis (106,484) of Bihar and West Bengal. On physical grounds Risley considers them to be a Hinduised offshoot of the Mundas. They still speak a dialect derived from Mundari. Like the Mundas, they have a large number of exogamous

¹P. K. Bhomick, 1963, p. 277.

totemic septs some of which bear Munda names. The Turis are mainly cane workers living on the outskirts of the Hindu villages. They are very industrious and law-abiding. There are no criminals among them.¹

The Dharkars (41,662) of the southern Ganges valley were also once a forest tribe, but have now settled in villages and employ Baiga priests or, at best, Ojhas, degraded Brahmins or probably priests of non-Aryan origin. They are a rather restless and primitive community.

They earn their livelihood as daily labourers, cultivators, blacksmiths or snake charmers.

In western Bengal and adjoining Bihar, along the Jumna and in Oudh resides another caste of partly settled and partly nomadic habits. It is the Bediya caste (43,812). Only 4,380 of the Bediyas were returned as belonging to the Scheduled Castes, while the rest were classed in the category of Scheduled Tribes. The caste is split into various functional sub-sections. Some of these earn their living as acrobats and conjurers, others as hunters and fowlers, while quite a few are snake charmers. The more respectable portion of the caste has settled down as cultivators.

The Bediyas appear to be a vagrant offshoot of the Maler tribe and thus belong probably to the Dravida-speaking group of tribals in north-eastern central India. In present times the Bediyas earn their livelihood also by the manufacture of fish-hooks and such articles as combs, needles, thread and tape; others make anklets, bracelets and necklets of zinc, or sell jungle medicine. In the north they have a bad reputation for thieving. By religion they are Hindus. Some of them have been converted to Islam, but even the Mohammedans do not accept them fully. Socially they are regarded as a very impure Hindu caste.

Another similar caste is that of the Kurariar. In West Bengal their number was in 1961 only 722. Their traditional occupation is the catching and selling of birds. They also collect fire-wood for sale. Their social status is very low. Also called Biadh, they were in the past classified as a criminal caste in Bengal. They consider themselves Hindus. The village barber acts as their priest.

In Rajasthan there is one begging caste, the Dakots who claim to be Joshi Brahmins. But caste Hindus do not accept water and food from them and treat them as untouchables. But Brahmins serve them

¹A. K. Das, 1966, p. 105-6.

in marriage and religious rites. They themselves keep aloof from the outcastes.

They derive their income entirely from begging. A few of them have taken to cultivation. Divorce and widow remarriage are generally forbidden, though not in all villages. They practise child marriage.

Another begging caste of Rajasthan are the Kalvelias. Some of them have taken to field work or trade in bamboo. They are a nomadic people and often change their residence. Their touch is polluting to caste Hindus. Usually they live outside the village in temporary huts. But they do not eat beef. Brahmins officiate in their marriages.

In central India a small nomadic caste, called Satia, wanders from one market place to the other, selling cattle. They buy young bulls at a cheap price, castrate them and sell them at a higher price. The Satias have no settled homes and move about with their family in bullock carts. They appear to hail from Rajasthan and may be exiled Rajputs. They are Hindus and worship the local Hindu gods and spirits. They have a special veneration for the *pipal* tree (Banyan tree). They now speak the Malvi dialect of Hindi, interspersed with words of the Harauti dialect spoken in Rajasthan.

The Satias have the curious custom of mortgaging their wives and other female relatives when in need of money. The debtor is not dishonoured by doing this nor the girl or woman, even if she bears to the lender one or more children. The children belong to the father when the debt is repaid and the woman retrieved. The lender must however always be a member of the Satia caste.¹

In western India, in the Khandesh region of Maharashtra, but also in Madhya Pradesh and even in Rajasthan, the Pardhis (7,132 in 1961) are a picturesque nomadic community. They are divided into many endogamous sub-sections, with special functions and peculiarities. Thus the Phansi-Pardhis are snarers and trappers of birds and other small animals. The Chita Pardhis used in the past to train and sell leopards (*cheeta*) for hunting. One other section, the Takankar or Takia, manufacture and repair grinding stones. Other sections are the Advichincher, the Langoli, the Shikari Pardhis, etc. In the Khandesh they are occasionally also employed as village watchmen. Their religious rites are that of low Hindu castes, with much magic and witchcraft. They have priests of their own community.

Physically they differ clearly from the village people. They are of

¹C. T. Venkatachar, 1933, p. 235.

medium stature, dark complexion and of grazole build. They are very hardy. The men are inveterate and skilled hunters. They use bullocks as decoys and hide behind them when approaching their game. Sometimes they use large shields in place of bullocks. They carry all their belongings and tents from place to place on bullocks. They wander in gangs of varying strength numbering even a hundred or more persons. They are not averse to commit dacoity and robbery, house-breaking, sheep stealing, thefts of crops. When caught at this they might use violence.

Their temporary settlements are usually at a distance from the villages.

A similar vagrant tribe or caste is that of the Mang-Garudi¹ (10,740 in 1961). In spite of the name they have nothing to do with the Mangs nor with the Garudis. They extend their wanderings all over the Deccan and Mysore State, and venture even into central India and Gujarat.

Like the Pardhis, they travel with their families, animals and all their property, encamping on the outskirts of fair-sized villages, within easy reach of the market. For shelter they build themselves temporary grass huts.

A gang of Mang-Garudis may sometimes number up to eighty or even more individuals, and is headed by an elderly man who acts as their spokesman and conducts all business with outsiders. The Mang-Garudis earn their living ostensibly by begging, performing conjuring tricks, and trading in barren buffaloes which they claim they can render fertile. The women collect and sell fire-wood, beg and prostitute themselves. Men, women and children are alleged to be habitual and inveterate thieves and pilferers. They strongly believe in omens, and when the omens are not favourable, they will not go on their forays.

In southern India there exists a community of Marathi-speaking bird catchers and beggars who call themselves Vagiri, while the Marathas call them Jangal Jati or Kattu Marathi, the Telugus Nikkalavandhu (jackal-people) and the Tamilians Kuruvikkaran. They are supposed to catch jackals by imitating very cleverly their plaintive cries. By this means they attract them and kill them with stout sticks. They eat their flesh and make bags out of their skins. They also pretend to collect the so-called jackal horn which is supposed to be a powerful talisman. But it is spurious and manufactured by artifice.

¹E. J. Gunthorpe, 1882, pp. 101-4.

The Vagiris are a nomadic people and wander from place to place with all their goods on pack bullocks. They earn their livelihood by collecting and selling fire-wood, as watchmen in field and garden, and in any other possible manner, while their womenfolk and children beg and entertain the people with songs. They also sell needles and glass beads.

The Vagiris worship Kali in a special manner. Three times in a year they assemble in certain places for this worship. They conceive Kali in her forms as Kali, Chamunda and Mahamayi.

The Vagiris are not exactly outcastes, but they live apart from the village people and do not associate with them.

A similar vagrant tribe, found in the Deccan and the adjoining southern tracts, is that of the Kaikadis (1,946 in 1961). In Andhra and Kanara they are known as Koravas or Korachas (15,326), in Tamilnad as Yerukulas. They have many sub-sections, each of which is again divided into four clans or *gots*. Each sub-section has its peculiar customs of dress, habits of living and ways of earning a living.

With the exception of a very small number of Kaikadis who have adopted cultivation as their occupation, and those who have settled in the villages as musicians, snake charmers, fortune tellers, porters, mat weavers, basket and brush makers and the like, the Kaikadis are a wandering tribe. They travel over the country in more or less large gangs, accompanied by their women and children, with their cattle, goats, dogs and other animals, and all their property. They live in temporarily constructed huts, at some distance from the villages but in the vicinity of water. Each encampment has its leader, who is sometimes a woman. The headman's word is law.

It is alleged that the Kaikadis are much addicted to dacoity, house-breaking and even highway robbery; in these activities they are ably assisted by their women.

They worship a female deity, and feast her with much drinking. They practise couvade, the husband being confined to bed, as soon as his wife has given birth to a child.

Further south in Andhra, Mysore State and Tamilnad there are similar tribes and castes leading a nomadic life and indulging occasionally in petty crime, which, however, they do not consider as something wrong as it is rooted in their traditional way of life as simply foraging and collecting food for their daily needs. They hold that they have a right for subsistence in this manner and if they are unable

to collect sufficient food they are forced to take from people who have it in abundance. They do not steal from each other, and distribute their earnings and the results of their pilferage among themselves with strict impartiality.¹

A similar caste is that of the Helavas (lit., cripples) in North Kanara. They are so-called because on a begging tour they sit on a bullock and hide one of their legs under a blanket, since their ancestor had been one-legged. They are Lingayats.

They have the tradition that originally they were genealogists who lived on the charity of their clients whose houses they visited and whose praises they sung. Now they are merely beggars, or work as daily labourers. They prostitute their unmarried daughters who are first dedicated to Maruti in whose name they carry on prostitution.

Further south, in Andhra and all over Tamilnad, but chiefly in Kurnool, Salem, Coimbatore and South Arcot districts, lives a gypsy tribe called Kurava. It is probably akin to the Kaikadis. The members of the caste were in the past well-known for their criminal activities as burglars, thieves, pick-pockets and robbers. On their raids they went as far as Cuttack, Puri and Calcutta, often working together with the Kepumaris, frequenting the railways and pilgrim places, wherever large crowds gather.

Each gang has a headman respected for his age, intelligence, daring and other leadership qualities. They obey him promptly. He presides over all their meetings and is given a place of honour at all social functions.

The Kuravas are divided into a number of endogamous sections which are again sub-divided into exogamous totemic clans (*interperu*). The totems are animals, plants and other objects.

The occupation of the Kuravas is manifold. Some are carriers and sellers of goods such as salt, tamarind, coarse sugar and leaves of the curry plant, all carried on the backs of donkeys or pack bullocks. Others manufacture baskets, grain bins and other articles of bamboo, or brushes made of roots. Some snare wild animals or birds in the jungle. Some are snake charmers, acrobats or dancers. They also tame monkeys and train them to perform tricks. The women earn their living by tattooing or fortune-telling. Some of the girls of the caste are reserved for prostitution being first dedicated to the service of a deity.

¹E. J. Gunthorpe, 1882, pp. 53-64.

One section, the Ur Kuravas, has given up nomadic life and is settled in villages. They are cultivators or daily labourers. Some have taken service in the police or in government service. They send their children to school and are on the way to losing their caste identity. They conform to the Hindu food regulations.

But the nomadic Kuravas are not fastidious in the choice of their food. They eat all kinds of animals, even monkeys and cats, rats and jackals, but abstain from beef and buffalo meat. They use to drink heavily at social gatherings.

Their social status is low, though they do not accept food from impure castes, not even from carpenters and blacksmiths, barbers, and washermen.

Their sex mores differ considerably from those of the high-caste Hindus. They tolerate the prostitution of their womenfolk. In some regions they are said to be in the habit of mortgaging their unmarried daughters when in debt. Divorce is easily obtained and frequent. Widow marriage is permitted.

The Kuravas practise *couvade*, the father of a new-born baby receiving all possible attention while the mother who has just given birth is left alone in seclusion for twenty-eight days.

The Kuravas are Hindus by religion and worship all the local deities. In the past they are said to have performed occasionally human sacrifice. They strongly believe in omens and witchcraft.

The Tottiyans or Kambalattans of Tamilnad are another such vagrant caste. They live by pig breeding, snake charming, and begging. They are also found in Andhra where they are, however, more settled and live by cultivation. They are supposed to be of Telugu origin and came to Tamilnad as soldiers of the Vijayanagar kings in the early 16th century. They claim to have been originally a shepherd race.

The Tottiyans are most numerous in Madurai District. They are divided into various sections. But the most important difference is that there is a settled community of farmers and petty land-owners while the rest are nomads. The two groups neither inter-dine nor intermarry.

As in many communities with a military past, the Tottiyans too do not attach much value to marital fidelity. Their womenfolk enjoy great sexual liberty. Divorce is easy and freely permitted. A married woman is supposed to cohabit also with the relatives of her husband. In the past the Tottiyans had the curious arrangement that boys were

married to elderly women. In such cases the father of the boy cohabited with his daughter-in-law and raised children for his son.

The Tottiyans have the reputation of being experts in magic.

In the caste there exists a certain antagonism to Brahmins. Tottiyans do not engage Brahmins for their religious functions. Women are forbidden to eat in Brahmin houses.

Attached to the Tottiyian caste is a community of beggars, the Pichiga vada. They seem to be a degraded sub-section of the caste, as an old legend about their origin seems to suggest.

All these vagrant castes, with few exceptions, differ racially from the settled village population of India, but greater is still their cultural difference. They are nomads by choice, and even the lure of greater material comforts cannot wean them away from a life of constant wandering. All efforts of the Indian Government and of various welfare organisations to settle them down have so far been unsuccessful. They belong to the culture of foodgatherers and hunters of small animals, though in modern times when their hunting grounds have been occupied by peoples of a superior culture they are often condemned to a life of pilfering and begging, of other pathetic attempts to sustain themselves. Yet they rarely evince a desire to exchange their freedom for the dull routine of settled village life.

They can scarcely be called untouchables in the strict sense of the word, though they are shunned and kept at a distance by the high-caste Hindus. But they are treated so not so much for reasons of ritual impurity, but more for their non-conformity with the customs and prejudices of Hindu village life and for their alleged immorality. They too, on their part, usually keep aloof of the settled Hindu castes, nor do they associate with the low castes in a village. They are a people apart, pathetically clinging to a way of life which becomes ever more difficult in an over-populated country like India, with a disdainful attitude to steady work and material security, still living, though very precariously, for the day only and not caring for the tomorrow. If they do not conform in the near future, they are condemned to extermination.

2. *Untouchables of Tribal Origin in Hindu Society*

Caste and untouchability are typical Hindu institutions; they are not indigenous to tribal society. But the Indian caste system is so powerful and all-pervading that few tribes can entirely escape its con-

sequences. Though the tribes may keep to themselves as far as possible, they are forced to maintain some relations with the outside world. In dealings with the Hindus the tribals also fall under the influence of the caste system, for the Hindus judge and classify them according to their own standards. They accord them that rank in their society which in their opinion the tribes deserve. They are judged according to the degree of their conformity to Hindu food habits and behaviour rules. Thus tribes which eat beef and the flesh of other 'unclean' animals or carry out a profession which is ritually polluting are often, though not always, regarded as impure and their touch as defiling.

Many nomadic tribes of India fall under this category, as they are not sufficiently fastidious in their choice of food and also not seldom undertake ritually polluting professions, such as mat and broom manufacture, providing entertainment as musicians, singers and dancers, doing services which formerly were done by slaves, etc.

However, Hindus are generally quite prepared to judge the tribals more leniently and not to apply the same strict standards on them as on members of their own society, especially if these tribes are wealthy and powerful. Though they may practise habits which the Hindus abhor, such as drinking liquor, eating meat (as long as it is not beef and the flesh of the domestic pig), permitting divorce and widow remarriage, these tribes may still retain a fairly high level of social status, provided they remain tribals and keep at some distance. But when these tribes aspire to a full admission to Hindu society, they must conform to the whole set of rules and regulations prescribed by Hindu law and custom, or accept a lower rank in the caste system.

In the intention to maintain a respectable caste status, some tribes refuse to accept food from any low caste member though originally such discrimination is foreign to them. Thus the Khandesh Bhils, for instance, do not eat food cooked by Mahars, Mangs and Chamars. Gonds do not eat food cooked by Baigas, Chamars, Balahis, Pardhans, a.o. A few tribes refuse to accept food from any outsider, even were he a Brahmin. They are not yet able to make a correct distinction between pure and impure castes and do not want to take any risks. Thus they accept cooked food from no one.

On the other hand, the employment of Brahmins for religious ceremonies is commonly regarded as a sign of good caste standing. Often a tribal community introduces specific Hindu rites for this very

purpose so that they can invite a Brahmin priest, while for their own traditional tribal ceremonies they still retain their old tribal priests, or priests from another tribe, as for instance the so-called Baigas or Ojhas.

But those tribals who are not willing or able to live up to the standard of a respectable Hindu caste, and retain customs and habits which in the eyes of the caste Hindus are ritually impure are often reduced to the state of a low caste if not of untouchables, when they come into close contact with caste Hindus and adopt to some extent the Hindu way of living, in short, if they stay in a Hindu village community.

Such a caste is certainly that of the Doms in northern India. It is now generally believed that the Doms were originally a tribe settled in the past in force along the southern slopes of the Himalayas and, judging by the forts and strongholds attributed to them and called after them, they were once in a dominant position. But they were later enslaved by more powerful invaders, such as the Khasyas and refugee Rajputs and Brahmins.

This enforced social contact with high-caste Hindus has reduced them to the state of servility and untouchability which they suffer in present time. They were also forced to perform functions which even the scavenger caste would not undertake. Thus they had to act as executioners for the former rulers. If they are not at the bottom of the social scale, they are certainly not far from it. Another reason for their low status is their laxity in the observance of food taboos. They eat beef, pork, horse-flesh, field-rats and carrion, all an abomination to orthodox Hindus.

Racially the Doms are not homogeneous. According to D.N. Majumdar, they are—probably due to continuous miscegenation—racially related to the Kshatriyas (Rajputs) on the one hand and to the Chamaras on the other.¹)

The caste is economically divided into four groups: 1. field-labourers, weavers and metal workers; 2. cane workers and lower artisans; 3. exorcists, porters and leather-workers, and 4. tailors, musicians and mendicants.

In the Kumaon and Garhwal hills the Doms live by agriculture and village handicrafts. Further west, the Panjab Dumnas are often, admittedly, the village sweepers, but their ordinary occupation is

¹cf. S. Fuchs, 1950, foreword.

that of basket-making. Basketry is, in fact, their specific trade, on the whole throughout the caste.

In Varanasi the Doms are the funeral attendants. There is a local belief that 'salvation' is not possible unless the Dom supplies the fire for cremation. The Doms have legitimate claims on the income from the two cremation grounds in Kashi. The earnings are of three kinds: 1. fees in cash, 2. fees in kind, 3. articles accompanying the corpse (half the shroud, bamboo bier, coconuts, etc.). Gold ornaments on the corpse are later dug out from the extinct pyre by the Doms. These earnings have to be shared, however, with the Mahapatras (funeral priests), barbers, boatmen, and potters.

The Doms are at their lowest in the Bengal Delta, to which the caste has been deported from Upper India, as tradition relates, to carry out any jobs that the local castes refuse to do.

In Bihar and its neighbourhood to the west, the Doms seem to fall into two sections. One is settled down to village life, mat-weaving, basket-making and field labour, with a little scavenging thrown in, the other section became more or less nomadic, and organised gangs are said to be expert and artistic burglars and thieves.

Some stray sections of the caste have penetrated even across the Central Belt and advanced into Andhra and Kanara. In the Deccan they earn their living as acrobats, dancers and bad characters generally. In Andhra they have settled mainly on the highland fifty to a hundred miles from the coast near Vizagapatam. The caste calls itself Domba. Like the Doms elsewhere, the Dombas are regarded with disgust by the local Hindu population, because they eat beef, pork, horse-flesh and carrion. The Bengalis as well as the Uriyas treat them as untouchables.

The Dombas also weave cloths and blankets used by the hill people but they do all kinds of jobs, even scavenging. Some are traders, horse-keepers, drummers and musicians, money-lenders and beggars.

They are not allowed to live in the village, and must build their huts in a hamlet of their own. Their touch is defiling.

They worship the local deities. Their chief god is Kaluga whom they venerate in the form of a copper coin. This coin is kept in every village in the house of the headman in an earthen pot decorated with rice and vermilion (turmeric). They also venerate spirits (Dumas) who are evil, but may help and protect them if properly propitiated.

In Andhra the Dombas have a bad reputation as drunkards and thieves. They seem to have a special preference for cattle lifting. In

sexual matters they take a very liberal attitude.

Possibly through the admixture of local blood the Dombas have a darker and coarser complexion than their caste fellows in the north. In the same manner, the Doms of Dacca, long separated from their native country on the Ganges, have acquired characteristics different from the Doms in Bihar but akin to the population of East Bengal.

The Doms have an intricate internal organisation. They are divided into numerous endogamous sub-sections and these again into exogamous clans. Due to the large area over which they are spread, their social structure varies considerably from region to region: Thus in Bihar they have territorial and titular exogamous sections; in Bankura these are totemic; in central Bengal they have adopted Brahminical *gotras*, while in the eastern regions the territorial system has been replaced by a lineage system. Marriages are regulated by prohibited degrees down to the fifth generation in descent from a common ancestor.

Their religion is a chaotic mixture of animistic cults and observances, borrowed haphazardly from various Hindu sects locally dominant.

In spite of all efforts of social workers to improve the economic and social position of the Doms, they themselves seem to have no aspirations beyond their traditional occupations or a little petty cultivation. The settled Doms, on the other hand, have disowned their nomadic caste fellows and broken off all social relations with them. Thus the Doms of the Panjab, whatever their nominal connection with the Doms, are now an entirely separate community, both in occupation and social rank.

The Malpaharias (61,129 in 1961), living in the lower levels of the Rajmahal hills in Bihar, are the Hinduised section of the Maler tribe (55,634), living in the upper parts of the Rajmahals. The Malpahariyas are now a low Hindu caste. Many of them work as daily labourers in the fields of the upper castes.

Another impure caste of definitely tribal origin is that of the Mahalis or Mahlis, in Chotanagpur and West Bengal. Their clan names are identical with those of the Munda, Santal and Bhumij tribes. One section of the Mahalis seems to be descended from the Santals.

This tribe or caste became degraded because its members did bamboo work for sale. At present they continue to make baskets,

grain bins and winnowing fans for sale, though they also do daily labour and work in the fields of the landlords. In the past they were palanquin bearers and porters. A few are cultivators on their own. They freely admit members of other castes into their community under the condition that the applicants eat the leavings of a Mahali dinner.

Their income from basket making is very meagre, in fact, it is below the subsistence level. Yet the Mahalis are not prepared to change over to a more lucrative occupation. They are extremely conservative.

There is no rigorous sex division of labour in Mahali basketry. Men and women co-operate in the preparation of the material and in the execution of the work. Mahali women are believed to have a natural skill for basket making. No special training is given to the young. They learn by imitating their elders doing the work.

The Mahalis perform two acts of worship in relation to their craft. One is Bhagot puja, performed by the male head of the working family. He must fast, burn incense, sacrifice a fowl, etc. The other is the Visvakarma puja. Again the male head of the family performs the worship. He offers sun-dried rice, clarified butter, incense, etc.

The Mahalis have a caste council (*panchayat*) which punishes a breach of the rules of clan exogamy and group endogamy, and any illegitimate relations between men and women.

The Kadars of West Bengal (5,610) are believed to be a degraded Hinduised section of the Naiya tribe, probably its priestly class (Laya or Naya) of the forest tribes in this region.

But their Hinduisation has not helped them much; they are poor daily labourers in the fields of the higher castes. As subsidiary occupations they do fishing and wood-cutting.

Socially they are very low, on the same level with the Doms and Haris. Their Hinduisation has remained imperfect. They still worship also the tribal gods and the nature spirits to whom the barbers of their own community sacrifice goats, fowls and pigeons.

A similar caste of low social status, now professing Hinduism, is that of the Kauras (2,394) of West Bengal. They claim to be descendants of the Kauravas, but their features betray their tribal origin. They have a black complexion, broad nose and thick lips.

Though they profess to be Hindus and worship Kali as their main deity, they bury their dead. They are divided into totemic clans which practise exogamy. All this proves that they have recently emerged

from a tribal community.

By occupation they are cultivators.

The Khairas (67,913) in West Bengal, especially strong in Bankura District, seem to be a Hinduised branch of the Kharwar tribe.

Their social status is low. They earn their living as daily labourers, vegetable growers, in some regions as collectors of catechu. Few of them are cultivators who own their fields.

The same is true of the Mals (117,704) in West Bengal. They do not rank higher than the Bagdis. The Mals are believed to have been originally a tribe similar to the Oraons, Malpahariyas or Savaras. At present they are completely Hinduised, worshipping Manasa as their main deity.

They are mainly cultivators, though some earn their livelihood as fishermen or village watchmen.

In eastern central India are found the Kols (124,434 in 1961), a large caste of undoubtedly former aboriginal origin. Today they are so completely Hinduised that not even a trace of their original language can be found. They speak now the Bagheli dialect of Hindi common in the region. The Kols are most numerous in Satna District, the former Rewa State. The Kols are moving in the villages of north-eastern central India in search of work.

In Jabalpur District they are divided into two main sub-sections, the Rautias and the Rauteles. The Rautias consider themselves superior in social status to the Rauteles whose daughters they take to wife, but to whom they refuse to give their own daughters as brides. They eat with the Rauteles only at wedding feasts, not on other occasions.

The Kols accept all kinds of jobs though most of them are daily labourers in the fields of the higher castes. But they are also employed as porters, in the past they acted as palanquin bearers.

Their main god is the tiger god Baghout Baba, but they worship also the other Hindu deities and celebrate the Hindu feasts common in the region where they reside and work.

But they still bury their dead, and take bride price instead of paying dowry, as the Hindu castes do.

Another degraded Hinduised tribal group is that of the Injhwars in the Bhandara and Balaghat districts of Maharashtra. They are a caste of field labourers and fishermen, but belonged originally to the Binjhar or Baiga tribe. They now observe the customs of the low Maratha castes, but have preserved also some Binjhar customs. Their social status is low. Their womenfolk act as midwives of the high castes of

the region. They admit members of the upper castes into their community, like most of the other impure castes. They are divided into four endogamous sections which, in turn, consist of exogamous clans of a faintly totemic nature.

The reason of their social degradation lies probably in their economic dependence on the upper castes and their impure food habits.

In Gujarat the Vitoliyas of Bulsar District are an impure caste whose mere touch is polluting. Their community seems to be constituted by outcasted Dublas, Chodris, Gamits and other tribes of a low social standing in Hindu society. They earn their living by making bamboo-baskets, mats, etc. Another reason for their impurity may be that they eat all kinds of impure food, and also the leavings of other people. By religion they are Hindus and observe all the Hindu feasts. But this does not help them; Brahmins refuse to serve them when they celebrate a feast.

A good example of an aboriginal tribe reduced to untouchability are the Koragas of South Kanara. They are certainly of tribal origin, as their physical features betray: they are short in stature and very slender, of dark complexion, with thick lips, a broad and flat nose, and rough and bushy hair.

At present they live on the outskirts of the Hindu villages, often in flimsy leaf huts, and are mainly engaged in basket-making and field labour. They are skilled in the manufacture of various household articles such as baskets, rice containers, winnowing fans, sowing baskets, boxes of various forms and shapes, rice-water strainers, and brushes. They also make wooden objects, such as bedsteads, cradles, etc.

Socially the Koragas rank even lower than the Holeyas, the main untouchable caste of Kanara. In some towns the Koragas are employed as scavengers. In the villages they remove the hides, horns and bones of cattle and buffaloes and sell them to the Mapilla merchants. They accept the cooked food of most castes and the leavings of their caste dinners. In the past they had been enslaved and were sold with the land on which they lived and worked. They were not allowed to visit markets without special permission, and at night they could not stay in a village. In former times they were even forced to carry a spittoon on the chest, because their spittle on the road was polluting. Their women were forced to cover themselves with leaves instead with a cloth. They had to keep off the road when a high-caste man walked by.

By religion the Koragas are Hindus.

A jungle tribe in Kanara, the Hasalars, have practically become an untouchable caste in the Malnad forest area where they live. The Hasalars form several territorial sub-sections, each of which is subdivided into a number of exogamous clans which are totemistic. The totems bear the names of animals, plants and objects.

The Hasalars are collectors of jungle produce for their employers, but also work as daily labourers in field and garden. They are practically agrestic serfs, as they are heavy toddy-drinkers and consequently always deep in debt. They have a slave mentality and expect their masters to take care of them, to arrange for their marriage and for treatment in sickness, to pay all their expenses. They thus willingly submit to bonded labour.

Though they worship the local village deities, they venerate in particular the spirits of their ancestors. Annually a sacrifice of fowls is performed in front of the stone monuments which they erect for their dead. An offering of flowers and incense is also made. They fear that they would fall sick if this sacrifice were omitted. If the ancestors want some veneration, they reveal it to them in a dream.

The Hasalars are not exactly treated as untouchables. Their touch does not defile a Brahmin or Lingayat. But they have to live in separate quarters and are not permitted to enter temples or the houses of the high-castes, nor can they use the village wells. In social rank they are below the Hale Paiks, but above the Holeyas and Madigas. Brahmins, barbers and washermen do not serve them.

Another such tribe is that of the Bedas. Their habitat is in the Kanara and Andhra districts. Although now almost completely Hinduised, their dark complexion, flat nose, frizzly hair and some social and religious beliefs and practices reveal them to be of tribal origin originally. No trace is left of their original language; they now speak the local dialects.

The Bedas are still mainly a hunting and cultivating caste. Bada is obviously a corruption of the Sanskrit word *vyadha*, a hunter. In the past they used to infest the highlands and passes through the jungle for robbery. They were used as soldiers and trackers by the rulers of Vijayanagar and later by Hyder Ali; they were reputed for their bravery and intimate knowledge of the jungle. Today, in a more peaceful but less exciting time, they find employment as field labourers, tenants, daily labourers, village watchmen, peons in police and government offices. But what they like most is hunting in the forest and

collecting honey and jungle fruits.

They eat all kinds of meat, even that of the cow. Socially they are not untouchables, but they keep aloof of ordinary Hindus. By religion they are Vaishnavas and occasionally invite Vaishnava Brahmins to act as their spiritual leaders.

They have the custom of dedicating some of their daughters to a Vaishnava temple or to the temple of a mother goddess. After dedication, a Basavi is however only nominally attached to the temple. Usually she stays at home. She is free to associate with any man of her own caste or of a superior one, and her children are legitimate. A Basavi can freely change her lover, but generally she remains faithful to one, at least for some time.

A similar caste, but socially lower, is that of the Koravas or Korachas. They live further south in Mysore and Tamilnad states, and are divided into a settled and a nomadic section, and of course into several endogamous territorial sub-divisions. Their name probably means 'hillmen'. They have lost their original language and much of their original culture.

The settled Korachas live in villages and work as farmers, farm tenants and daily labourers on the fields. They also make baskets, and all other types of wickerwork, while their women engage in tattooing and fortune-telling. In pre-railway times the Korachas carried goods, especially salt, on pack bullocks to the markets. Some were snake-charmers or just beggars.

The nomadic section was not averse to break the law. Even now nomadic Korachas live in gangs and stay in open places near the villages. Each gang is headed by a headman whose office is usually conferred on the most competent man of the group. He is held in great respect and takes all the decisions. He is supposed to take care of the families of those in jail. When his efficiency is declining another more competent leader is chosen.

The Korachas are not treated as untouchables. In the hierarchy of castes they occupy a place just above the barbers and washermen. They are not supposed to enter the inner portion of a temple. They eat all kinds of meat, but no beef. They are much addicted to liquor. Only the Madigas and Holeyas accept food from their hands.

In south Kanara there is another low caste, the Kudiya, who too were formerly of tribal origin. They show by their physical features that originally they were tribals. But they have given up their

tribal culture and live now in the hills as agrestic labourers in the cardamom plantations, more or less in bonded labour. They dwell in the jungles beneath rocks, in caves, in low huts, and they continually shift from one place to another. At the season of the cardamom crop they come down from the hills and sell off cardamoms to the contractors or merchants. It is alleged that such cardamom is usually stolen from the landlord or plantation owner, but the Kudiyas might still consider themselves the owners of the jungle which has been taken from them many years ago.

The Kudiyas are not regarded as a polluting caste, and are permitted to enter the houses of their masters, though not the kitchen or dining room.

It is alleged that in former times a Kudiya did not observe the laws of exogamy and marriages even between a mother and her son were permitted. Weddings are very simple affairs, and no elaborate ceremonies are performed. Divorce is frequent.

The Kudiyas are fond of toddy and eat monkeys and squirrels.

3. Outcastes in Tribal Society

The Hindu caste system has not only affected the social relations of the tribal communities with the Hindus, it has penetrated into the social structure of the tribals as well. Divisions and splits within tribal communities due to caste prejudices are not at all rare. Quite common in tribal societies is the distinction between a superior Hinduised and an inferior tribal section. Such distinction due to unequal degree of Hinduisation, or Sanskritisation—a more fashionable term nowadays!—is frequent in many central Indian tribes, such as the Baigas (Binjhawars and ordinary Baigas), Gonds (Raj-Gonds and Dhur-Gonds), Korkus (Muwasi or Raj-Korkus and Patharias), and Bhilalas (Bara Bhilalas and Barelas).

In each case the Hinduised section considers itself superior and refuses to interdine and intermarry with the tribal section. This separation is maintained though both sections are well aware of their common origin and often still retain their common tribal name. At the most the Hinduised section takes wives from the tribal section, but refuses to give their daughters as brides to the tribal section. Quite often the tribal section deeply resents this treatment, but after some time gets resigned to it. Thus the Gurungs of Nepal have two sections, the Char Jat and the Sola Jat. In the past the families of the Char

Jat considered themselves superior to those of the Sola Jat and refused to intermarry with them. But nowadays intermarriages between the two classes are again more frequent. The Apa Tanis of north-eastern India have two sections, one of nobility, the other of serfs. Both are endogamous.

Tribal society may be further influenced by the Hindu caste system in the observance of food taboos. Hinduised tribes often regard tribes which eat beef and other ritually impure food or pursue impure occupations as polluting, pretending that as Hindus of respectable caste they cannot associate with them anymore. They may also regard other tribes as inferior because the latter are economically dependent on them and serve them. Especially landless tribes which receive their wages in kind and even accept cooked food from their employers are often treated as inferior and consequently forbidden to enter their masters' houses and may not eat and smoke with them.

Beginning with Nepal we find that the Magars regard those of their caste who earn their living as smiths, miners or stone workers as inferior. The Kamaras and Bhujels of Nepal are also of low social rank because they were former slave castes and liberated as late as in 1927. Though they have changed their caste name and call themselves at present Shiva Bhaktas, the other castes have not forgotten their former status and refuse to accept them as equals.

The Koltas of Jaunsar Bawar (Dehra Dun District, U.P.), though listed as a Scheduled Tribe, are treated as untouchables by their masters. Poverty, social degradation, discrimination due to caste and deliberate and systematic exploitation, all these the Koltas suffer in silent despair. "We are cursed," said one, "only God can help us!"

The Koltas are virtually serfs, perpetually indebted to and always working for their landlords and constantly being transferred from one to another, but allowed to cultivate some of their masters' land. They are eking out a miserable living and are treated little better than draught animals. Most of them are bonded labourers for life.

They are forced to live apart from the high castes of the village. They are not allowed to enter the temple nor even touch its walls. When they enter the main village, they must take off their shoes, also when meeting a Brahmin or Rajput. They must address the high castes with the title *Dhuniya* (Your Lordship), and may not use the common *Ram Ram*, or *Namaste*. They cannot draw water from the village well and when bathing in a river, they must go downstreams. Food and utensils of the high castes are polluted if touched by a Kolta and

must be thrown away. For the amusement of the high-castes Koltas are dressed in the skins of deer, dogs, bullocks, sheep and goats and treated as such on certain feasts.

The Koltas practise fraternal polyandry; up to five brothers may share a wife. Women are frequently sent to towns and cities for prostitution to increase the income of the family.

In religion they are Hindus. They worship as their main gods Shiva and Parvati, and Mahasu. They believe to be the descendants of the Pandavas. They strongly believe in spirits and witchcraft.¹

In Chota Nagpur the Mundas have a sub-section, the so-called Khangar Mundas, whom they consider as impure and polluting because, as their tradition goes, the ancestor of the Khangars once ate ritually impure food. But it is more probable that this section is degraded because a Munda married a Khangar girl. The Khangars are low caste village watchmen in Bundelkhand.

Also in Chota Nagpur, the Asuras, primitive iron smelters and smiths, who certainly have no racial links with the Lohars, the Hindu caste of blacksmiths, are treated as socially inferior and ritually impure. The Mundas have a myth according to which Sing Bonga, their Supreme God, punished the iron smelting Asuras for their arrogance and proud behaviour and burnt them to death.

Further south, in central India, there is another tribe of primitive iron smelters and smiths, the Agarias. The Gonds and other aboriginal tribes of the region treat them as untouchables.

In the Seoni and Mandla districts the Bhimas are a small caste of musicians, singers and dancers who perform at weddings and other feasts of the Gonds. As they accept alms from the Gonds, the latter treat them as outcastes. But the Bhimas are clearly an offshoot of the Gond tribe. They have the same exogamous clans and worship the same high-god, Bara Deo. At their performances the Bhima men play and dance. Their main instrument is the *tuma* (gourd), a primitive one-stringed violine. Their women dress like Hindu women. When they dance they do not wear any special ornament.²

The Ojhas, commonly believed to be an offshoot of the Gond tribe, are the soothsayers and minstrels of the Gonds and Korkus. They lead an unsteady life, wandering from village to village, singing the praises of the Gond heroes to the beating of drums and castanets. The

¹R. N. Saksena, 1962, pp. 14-5, 70-4.

²R. V. Russell and Hiralal, 1916, p. 350.

men also dance before the Gonds. For this service they expect to be fed and clothed by the Gonds. But they supplement their diet also by catching animals and birds in the jungle.

They are not fastidious in their choice of food, accept cooked food from all castes, except the most impure ones, and eat pork and even beef. They admit members of all castes, even of sweepers, into their community provided they marry a member of the Ojha tribe and pass the test of begging from the Gonds.

Though originally members of the same tribe, the Gonds, as also the Hindu castes of the same region, treat the Ojhas as impure, do not allow them into their houses and do not accept food or water from them. It appears that the Ojhas are not degraded so much for their indiscriminate food habits, but because they practically depend for their livelihood on the mercy of the Gonds. This dependence the tribals consider a degrading situation.

A similar case is that of the Pardhans who are also believed to be of Gond origin. They are the genealogists and priests of the Gonds. As such they are economically dependent on the Gonds, and the Gonds treat them as an impure caste. As priests, the Pardhans perform the worship of Bura Deo for the Gonds and every year goats and pigs are sacrificed to Bura Deo together with liquor, coconuts, betel leaves, flowers, lemons and rice.

Because the Pardhans eat almost any kind of food, including beef, pork, even the flesh of lizards and rats, they are regarded as impure by the respectable Hindu castes. But also the Gonds do not accept food from their hands though they are their priests. They also act as musicians and singers of Gond hero ballads. They of course expect a generous remuneration for their services from the Gonds. But they have to pay a heavy price for this: It makes them economically dependent on the Gonds who find such a situation degrading and consequently treat the Pardhans as outcastes.

There exists a small caste of snake-charmers and jugglers, the Gaurias, in Chhattisgarh District. They are obviously a degraded section of the Gond tribe, since they have the same clan names and observe the same laws of exogamy and marriage taboos as the Gonds. They earn their livelihood catching and exhibiting cobras and other snakes. They make them dance by rattling a small drum (*damru*) in the shape of an hourglass. They beg from the Gonds and other castes and eat all kinds of food, even the flesh of rats and jackals. For this reason and also because they beg from the Gonds, they are of low social status and

no other caste will accept food and water from them. They admit members of any higher caste into their community. They are much addicted to alcohol.

But even lower than the Gaurias are the Gond-Gowaris, a caste which came into existence through illegal unions between members of the Gond tribe and the Gowari shepherds. Being of mixed origin, the children of such unions are considered ritually impure and lower than either the Gonds and the Gowaris. They have to stay outside the village precincts. They are either farmers or field labourers. They have the same clan names as the Gonds, worship the same clan gods, but with one addition—Durga or Devi. They allow widow marriage and divorce; their rules of sexual behaviour are lax and their women grant their favours freely to men of other caste, except the lowest. They eat all kinds of food forbidden to the Hindus.

More to the east, in Sambalpur District of Orissa, resides a small aboriginal tribe of brass workers, the Sidhiras or Sithiras. Because they are engaged in this type of work for money, they are despised by the other aboriginal tribes of the region. Even their touch is polluting. Of course, they are not fastidious in the choice of their food and eat field rats, lizards and the like animals. They are much addicted to liquor.

The Pentias (9,656 in 1961), aboriginal blacksmiths of Orissa and West Bengal, are also regarded as outcastes. Not even the Hindu iron smiths and brass workers accept them as their equals. These two tribal artisan castes have no permanent home; they wander from village to village in search of work.

Also in Orissa, a small caste of bamboo workers, the Kandras, are obviously an offshoot of the Gonds. Their name Kandra might be derived from *kand*, the arrow. The Kandras seem to have been first specialists in the manufacture of arrows, but with the disappearance of bow and arrow they found themselves out of job. They still speak Gondi. They are an impure caste.

At the western side of the tribal belt in central India we find the Korkus and still more to the west the Bhils. In many Korku and Bhil villages another impure tribe can be found, the Nahals. The Nahals serve the Korkus and Bhils as daily labourers and permanent field servants, rarely having land of their own. They accept cooked food from Korkus and Bhils. For this reason and probably also because they eat beef, the Nahals are treated as impure. It is still remembered, however, that only a generation ago the Bhils as well as the

Korkus interlined and even intermarried with the Nahals. They seem to have had a language of their own, which differed from the Munda and Dravidian languages.

The nomadic Katkaris or Kathodis of Maharashtra too are kept at a distance by the superior tribes. But the Hindu villagers also fear them because they have the reputation of being powerful sorcerers. The low social status which the Katkaris now suffer has been introduced into tribal society after the leading tribes came into close social and cultural contact with the Hindus. Then they also adopted their caste prejudices.

In the Nilgiri hills the Kotas, aboriginal smiths and musicians, are treated as untouchables by the Todas and Badagas whom they serve. They are not allowed to enter a Toda or Badaga dwelling. Their touch is polluting and a Toda or Badaga who has touched a Kota even inadvertently must take a bath of purification. The Kotas are indeed dirty in their living habits and eat carrion, at least they did so in the past.

This chapter shows that many tribal groups, though originally without caste prejudices, have succumbed to Hindu influence, adopted the caste system and even untouchability. It also shows that quite a few tribes have been reduced to the status of untouchables by Hindus and tribals as well, not so much because they were eating impure food or were lax in sex morality, but because they were poor, landless and dependent on others for their livelihood. This was the decisive factor.



CHAPTER 2

The So-Called Criminal Castes

In upper India a number of so-called Criminal Castes are in existence which claim Rajput descent. It is possible that after the defeat of the Rajputs by the Muslims some groups of them, dispossessed of their land, were unable to earn a living by cultivation or as soldiers in the armies, and took to a life of crime. During the almost continuous wars in north India and the struggle for supremacy there was no authority to check these lawless gangs which pilfered the countryside. After the British had taken over the rule of India, however, they were determined to stamp out these anti-social activities and to establish law and order. The British Administration was at the time confronted mainly with two well organised bodies of criminal pursuit, the Thugs and the Pindaris. Both had to be exterminated in specially organised campaigns.

Finally the various displaced and restless communities were also to be tackled. Various special laws had to be issued to meet these dangers to public safety legally. In 1871 the Criminal Tribes Act was promulgated which was several times amended later, the last time in 1924. It placed certain communities under strict supervision and restricted their free movement. However, the fact of being branded with the designation "Criminal Tribe" had often tragical consequences for a whole community and especially for those individuals who were keen on leading an honest life. For all members of these criminal tribes were indiscriminately placed at the mercy of often very unsympathetic and corrupt officials. Instead of weaning the real culprits among them from a life of petty thieving, it often drove, by the despair of wounded feelings, innocent members of such communities into a life of rebellion and serious crime. After India became independent the Criminal Tribes Act was rescinded in 1952 by the new Indian Government. These tribes are now called 'Denotified

Communities."

The Sansis¹ (59,073 in 1961) are a tribe of this type. They claim Rajput descent. According to their traditions their ancestor was the Rajput Sansi who had two sons, Behdoo and Mahla, who in turn had twelve and eleven sons respectively. In fact, there exist in north India the Sansi caste as well as the Bediya (10,311) and Mala (4,506) castes. Each of these castes is sub-divided into various sections though always pursuing similar occupations.

According to their traditions, the Sansis were expelled from Rajasthan by Muslim invaders in the 13th century. Dispossessed of their homelands, the Sansis first migrated to the Punjab and other regions eking out their livelihood as shepherds, field-hands and genealogists of the land-owning Jats. It is claimed that the great Sikh leader Ranjit Singh was a Sansi.

The nomadic habits and the inclination to marauding and cattle-lifting, petty thieving, etc., made the Sansis soon suspect to the British officials who especially in the troubled times after the "Mutiny" made strenuous efforts to restore internal peace and a semblance of order and lawfulness in India. The Sansis, as "vagrants," fell under the category of "Criminal Castes" and were treated strictly according to the letter of the law. They were deprived of their human rights merely for the fact of their descent from the Sansi community and often forced to a life of crime. This has happened also in more recent times, and even some Rajputs, like the famous robber Mansingh² became dacoits because they were prevented by a cruel fate from earning their living by honest means.

But though many members of the community may have led an honest life, the caste as such certainly deserved its bad reputation. Highway dacoity and cart robbery were Sansi specialities. But they also indulged in house-breaking, tent-thieving, looting of encampments and isolated homesteads, cattle and sheep lifting, thefts of all sorts including standing crops and other agricultural crops. They also took to railway thieving.

On August 26, 1977, the Times of India, Bombay, reported that the people of Nasik and Bhusaval were frightened by a gang of Sansis. This gang, comprising ten members, had attacked secluded houses in Nasik and Bhusaval. They first used to throw stones at the windows

¹Sher Singh Sher, 1965.

²K. Anderson, 1961.

or break open the doors with axes and crowbars. In all cases, the dacoits were clad only in a loincloth (*lungi*). At times they masked their faces. They assaulted the people in the houses with heavy sticks if they met with resistance. They took away whatever they could find in the houses, whether valuable or not. They operated only at night.

The Times of India recalled that a similar gang of Sansis had terrorised Bombay suburbs some years ago in a similar manner.

In their criminal pursuits the Sansis were always ably assisted by their womenfolk who ostensibly sold roots and herbs, but at the same time spied out likely homes yielding a good booty. In contrast to the Nats, another similar caste, the Sansi women were not given to prostitution and were very staunch in the defence of their male relatives when trouble was threatening.

While parts of the caste are settled in the north and earn a living by cultivation or field labour, another part is still a wandering tribe, with no steady habitat. Sansis can be found practically all over India. They travel in gangs of various strength, with their families, animals and all their belongings. They never put up in towns and villages; they shun all buildings, temples, resthouses (*dharmshalas*) and the like. Each gang is headed by a so-called Naik or Sarganah. He is socially their leader and directs all their enterprises. His authority rests mainly on his personal capabilities.

The Sansi women hold a good position in their community. They enjoy much influence in the tribal councils in which they can speak freely, bear witness and give advice. This would be unthinkable in Rajput society. The status of the women in the tribal council is the more important as owing to the natural aversion of the Sansis to apply for the protection of the law, these councils regulate practically all affairs and disputes of the community. Moreover, a woman can inherit property; she can divorce her husband and remarry. Sansi society, further, discourages polygamy and permits it only in the form of the levirate and sororate. The custom of paying a bride-price is frowned upon by the Sansis.

Socially the Sansis are organised into various endogamous subsections which, in turn, are split into exogamous clans and hundreds of sub-clans. A sub-clan (*dera*) was originally simply a temporary encampment under the control of a leader. Some clans, due to marital unions with members of lower castes, have an inferior social status and find it consequently difficult to get their daughters married

into the higher clans, and finding brides for their sons.

The Sansis stand in a curious relationship to the Jat tribe, each family of which has its Sansi genealogist. The word of the Sansi is accepted as final when a question arises in connection with pedigrees. It is not easy to trace this important functional attachment between Jats and Sansis unless some real racial connection is assumed.

The Sansis profess a religion which is basically Hindu, but it is of the most simple type, and they feel bound to call in outside spiritual aid only in cases when the ghost or demon of the locality has caused serious illness or misfortune. A few Sansis have been converted to Islam, more have become Sikhs, but one large section asserts its Rajput origin and keeps aloof from the rest of the tribe. It appears that recent anthropometric studies support this claim of the Sansis to some extent.¹

In physical appearance the Sansis do indeed not differ much from the Rajputs and Jats of north India. The men are of wheatish brown complexion, but never dark. They are of medium height, strong, wiry and agile. Their women are often slender, good-looking and well-formed.

One section of the Oudhia caste (earth-workers) has taken to crime. They are said to lead, when at home, a life of indolence on the proceeds of the last coup. They are notorious cheats, pick-pockets, thieves and house-breakers though generally they avoid acts of violence. When reconnoitring they beg in the disguise of Bairagis (religious mendicants) or act as grocers, sellers of sweetmeat, ice-cream, etc. Those at Fatehpur specialise in forgery. Their chief deity is Kali Mata. They invoke blessings and curses in her name and seek her aid in the fulfilment of their criminal enterprises. An oath in her name is binding.

The Magahiya Doms of Gorakhpur are very different from the great majority of the caste which is law-abiding, and have come in for special treatment. Their thieving habits and their inability to settle to any regular agricultural or industrial pursuit led eventually to the institution in 1884 of a special system of supervision. All Magahiya Doms were registered and compelled to reside in quarters called *domara khana*s, built in various parts of the district, but always close to a police station. Every night a roll-call was taken to prevent absconding and a Dom caught at any distance from his *domarakhana* was

¹Sher Singh Sher, 1965, pp. 24-30.

persecuted for bad livelihood.

But all attempts at inducing them to take up agricultural work have failed and at present the only honest method of earning a livelihood open to the Magahiya Doms is by working on the conservancy staffs of the municipality, the Act XX towns and the notified areas. Otherwise they eke out a precarious existence by begging and thieving, while their women are not seldom prostitutes. The system is far from satisfactory, and a fresh effort towards reclaiming the Magahiyas has been made. The old police lines at Gorakhpur have been made over to the Salvation Army which will endeavour to train a number of the Doms to some industrial occupation, though the ultimate success of the experiment is highly problematical. In 1907 there were 34 Dom settlements in the district of Gorakhpur, with 1,460 inmates, including 541 women and 457 children.

The Harnis are a typical criminal caste of the Punjab, residing in the hills from Ludhiana to Sialkot and also in Ferozepur and Faridkot. They claim to be Rajputs driven in the past from Bhatner by famine and employed by the Rai of Raikot in Ludhiana for purposes of robbery and to harass his enemies. They may originally have been Bhils from Rajasthan. Their chief crimes are house-breaking, and highway robbery. They use to travel in gangs, under the disguise of carriers with pack-bullocks. Their women also wander about as pedlars to pilfer and collect information. They are all Mohammedans.

Another criminal caste is that of the Tagus, of Karnal and the upper plain of the Ganges and Jumna. They claim to be Brahmins. They wear the sacred thread (*janew*) and seclude their women. But they are pick-pockets and commit other petty thefts.

The small vagrant tribe of the Haburas¹ (2,466), along the upper Ganges and Jumna, claims descent from the Chauhan Rajputs. It is more likely that they are a branch of the Sansis. They resemble the parent tribe in the high status of the women and strong inclination to thieving, but seem to be more Hinduised in their customs. The unmarried girls enjoy considerable sexual freedom. Like many of the criminal tribes in northern India, the Haburas too have a strong admixture of Gujarati in their dialect. This would suggest a south-western origin and a probable Rajput connection. In any way, the Haburas display a notable audacity in their criminal exploits.

Another criminal caste, originally from the Punjab, but at present

¹A. Ayyangar, 1951, p. 21 f.

settled and operating in many parts of India, is that of the Chapparbands,¹ also known as Fakir coiners. They are specialists in forgery. Many of this caste have settled down in Bijapur District, but travel all over India. They are all Sheikh Muslims, and ostensibly live by begging. But some have taken to cultivation and a few earn their living as village watchmen. On the whole, however, it is only their womenfolk that work in the fields and stay at home, while the men often absent themselves for months and are on their expeditions. They usually work in gangs from three to ten. Though traditionally manufacturers of counterfeit coins, they are not great adepts in this craft and are able to pass on their crude products only to the more backward and simple villagers.

Another caste with criminal inclinations, likewise claiming Rajput origin and nomadic in habits, are the Mianas² of Kathiawar and Cutch. Their central place is Malia, a former princely State. From there they make long journeys to Sind as also to Ahmedabad and all over Kathiawar. In the past they seem to have been sea-farers and great pirates.

The Mianas, though originally Hindus, were some centuries ago converted to Islam. Though they hold certain Pirs in veneration, their mode of life is still much akin to that of Rajputs. In appearance they closely resemble the Sindis. They are a handsome, virile-looking race, tall, with long wavy hair, well-kept bushy beards and aquiline features. Their complexion is swarthy. Their women are known for their good looks and bad morals. Though a few have accepted employment in the police force or do farm-work, the majority of the Mianas do no honest work. If their movements were not checked and controlled by the police at present, they would be now what they were in the past, confirmed and daring freebooters and dacoits, addicted to highway robbery, cattle-lifting, house-breaking, thefts of all kinds, kidnapping of women, etc. But the present close supervision through the police forces them to give up their old criminal habits.

Another well-known wandering tribe in India who at least until recent times subsisted by organised robbery and thieving is that of the Bhanus³ (7,903). They are found in north and central India, though.

¹E. J. Gunthorpe, 1882, pp. 74-77; S. C. Misra, 1964, pp. 85-6.

²D. N. Majumdar, 1950, p. 32.

³C. J. Bonington, 1933, pp. 36-44.

sections of the tribe reside also in the east and extend their operations as far as Pakistan.

The Bhantus too claim Rajput descent and consider Chittorgarh their mother-city. Their tradition goes that they were dispersed when the Muslims took Chittorgarh, and thus forced them to leave their homes and accustomed manner of life, live in the jungles and to become homeless wanderers.

But in fact the Bhantus seem to be an offshoot of the Sansis, Haburas, Kanjars, Karwal Nats and Jats. But nothing definite can be stated in the absence of anthropometric evidence. The Bhantus are divided into thirty-six *gotras* or clans which are exogamous, and differ in the observance of customs relating to worship, marriage, burial, etc., little from the Hindus. Their clans are not totemistic.

The Bhantus have a good physique and are reputed as good runners. The women are strong, handsome and gifted with exceptionally strong voices. They lead their nomadic life in gangs, consisting of about a dozen families. Usually they camp away from the villages. Their system of internal administration is communal; all disputes are settled by a council of elders. Discipline is strict and morality, excepting offences against property, rather high. Incest is severely punished, and sexual promiscuity is not tolerated. Divorce is permitted, but frowned upon.

Their religion is that of the local lower Hindu castes; the Bhantus worship with preference female deities. But they never visit Hindu temples nor do they employ Brahmins in their religious rites. They have a strong veneration for their ancestors.

Among themselves they speak a kind of thieves' slang, mutilating the words in order to make them incomprehensible to outsiders. Their raids used to be well prepared and rehearsed. A gang in action would usually consist of some thirty to forty men. If resistance was shown they would be merciless. They were not averse to torture and rape. The plunder was at once buried; after the excitement had died down, it was dug up and disposed of by women. The receivers were usually gold-smiths.

It may be mentioned that in 1926 a large gang of Bhantus with their wives and children were resettled in the Andaman Islands. They abandoned their crime altogether, and earned their living by cultivation while others found employment in saw-mills and as coolies. Their conduct is above reproach.

The Sanaurhiyas or Chandravedis, another nomadic community of

predatory pursuits, often declare themselves as Sanadh Brahmins. They are a composite social group, recruited from all sorts of castes, but now bound together by the usual caste regulations, including one prohibiting all crimes of violence. They commit thefts by day only. Their headquarters are in Bundelkhand, but they are mostly on the move in disguise, with a few of their wealthier members established in the chief towns to act as receivers of the goods obtained on the journey.

All these castes, with the exception of the Sanaurhiyas and perhaps the Tagus, who claim to be Brahmins, keep up a pretence of Rajput descent and have caste divisions or *gotras* like the Rajputs. Their marriages are arranged according to the *gotras* of the Rajputs, while their birth and death ceremonies are likewise governed by Rajput customs with local variations.

Another criminal caste, further south, is that of the Ramoshis. The Ramoshis are found mainly in Poona, Satara and Ahmednagar district in strong concentration, but they are also spread over the other districts of Maharashtra. They claim to be descendants of Rama, i.e., Ramavanshis. They are also called Naiks.

They live on the outskirts of villages. Enthoven believes that they belong to the Bedar caste. But they have admitted recruits from the Kunbi and Mang castes into their community as the names of certain sub-sections show.

The Ramoshis belong to the "Denotified Castes," which means that in British time they were a criminal caste and were under strict police-surveyance. Their present occupation is that of village watchmen and cowherds. In pre-British times they occupied the hill-forts from which they carried out their depredations. This was the manner how to recover their wages ! The Ramoshis do not consider themselves as low castes. They are served by Brahmins. Only the Mang Ramoshis are untouchables.

The Waghris of Gujarat¹ (109,583 in Gujarat, altogether over 200,000) obviously identical with the Baghris or Bagdis of central India, claim kinship with the Sansis of the Panjab. This may be correct, for they are very similar to the Sansis in physical appearance though their racial stock is somewhat changed by an admixture of local blood.²

According to their own traditions the Waghris came to Gujarat via

¹P. G. Shah, 1967.

²S. Fuchs, 1967, p. 127f.

Rajasthan. From Gujarat they later spread over central India and northern Deccan. Though adopting everywhere the local languages, the Waghris have retained remnants of Gujarati in their present forms of speech.

They are sub-divided according to their various main occupations, and where they are numerous, are also divided according to areas. These sections are endogamous. The Waghris are still keen hunters and bird-snarers. They also keep fowls and rent fruit trees and other productive trees by the year, selling the crop. Several sub-sections, like the Kankapdias and Talabdas, have taken to cultivation. Others are cattle dealers, sellers of stick brushes for cleaning the teeth (Datania), or drummers during the wedding season.

Most of the Waghris wander about in the fair season, though some groups have now more or less permanently settled near villages and in the slum areas of the big cities like Ahmedabad and Bombay, buying and selling old clothes and other things. When travelling they are under a headman, in gangs of from five to ten families, with their animals and property, staying only two or three days in one place.

The Waghris have their own priests or clan-elders (*bhuvas*) who perform all ceremonies for them and regulate their social affairs. It is worthy of note that they have a sort of public confession which is resorted to especially when a husband suspects the fidelity of his wife.¹

In southern central India and Berar a small vagrant caste can be found which also has a criminal reputation; the name of the caste is Gopal or Borekar. Gopal means a cowherd and it is an epithet of Krishna. The Gopals claim to be the descendants of the cowherds of Vrindaban. Borekar is a mat-maker. Whatever their pretensions as to their descent, the Gopals are apparently recruited from children offered to the gods by Maratha Kunbis, Dhangars, Kasars, Sonars, Salis, Banjaras and even Mahars. Though originally consecrated to the Gods, they are now untouchables and their very touch is polluting. The reason of their social degradation is probably their caste mixture.

They earn their living by acrobatic feats with bamboos, by begging and as cowherds and daily labourers. By religion they are Hindus but their priests are the caste elders, not any Brahmins.

They are divided into five sections, of unequal social status. The Marathi Gopals are of highest rank, and all other sections accept food from them. The Vir Gopals are much lower; they eat the flesh

¹P. G. Shah, 1967, pp. 61-7.

of dead cattle and are makers of mats from the leaves of the date palm. They live in small huts at the outskirts of the villages. The Pangul Gopals are mat-makers and beggars. Those Panguls who have taken to cultivation refuse to intermarry with the mendicant Panguls, but they interdine with them. The Pahalwan Gopals are wrestlers and challenge the strong villagers to wrestling bouts. The Kham Gopa's are acrobats and perform on poles (*kham*). The Gujarati Gopals are the lowest in rank and no other section accepts food from them. They earn their living ostensibly as tumblers and tight-rope walkers.

All these sub-sections of the Gopals have a bad reputation and are frequently accused of cattle-lifting. They are said to have a very ingenious method of spiriting away stolen buffaloes, handing them on very quickly from one post to the other until they have crossed the boundary of the State in which they were stolen. All Gopals pretend to be engaged in buying and selling buffaloes; they also sell milk and butter.

A large section of these Gopals must have wandered off eastwards as far as Bengal where they are called Gopa. They are keepers of cattle and sellers of milk and milk products. Though their reputation is much better in Bengal, they are still regarded as impure and Brahmins refuse to serve them. They have priests of their own caste who call themselves Varna-Brahmins, or "degraded" Brahmins. A considerable section of this caste has given up its traditional profession and taken to farming. They call themselves Sadgopas or "good" Gopas and have been accepted into the Navashakha caste group, i.e., they are now in the low caste section and Brahmins consent to act as their priests. The Gopa cowherds have lately begun to reject their caste name and want to be called Yadavas, following the example of their northern caste fellows, the Ahirs of Uttar Pradesh.

A criminal caste, with its main concentration in Ganjam District, but found also in other parts of Orissa, is that of the Dandasis. Robbery and theft are their traditional caste occupations. They habitually populate the jails of Ganjam District. They derive their right for robbery and theft from the belief that they helped the Pandava brothers to escape from the lac fort in which their enemies wanted to burn them by digging an underground passage. Or they claim to be descendants of Dhuthika, the handmaid of Radha with whom Krishna had an illicit affair.

Dandasi is said to mean 'worthy of punishment.' But a more likely

explanation of the word is: 'man with a stick' (*danda*) because many Dandasis in Ganjam District have been made village watchmen who always carry a stout stick. A Dandasi village watchman takes pride in keeping his village safe from theft and robbery. He calls himself Naiko, which means 'headman.'

The Dandasis have a fairly strict caste organisation and a headman in this caste has much authority. This is so with most criminal castes.

The social status of the Dandasis is very low.

One of the "Criminal Castes" in Tamilnad is called Kallar, which means "thieves." Their number surpasses half a million. They live south of the Kaveri river and east of the Western Ghats; their strongest concentration is in Tanjore and Madurai districts.

They consider themselves Shudras, not Harijans. In their present habitats the Kallar seem to be fairly recent immigrants though they might not be a people of north India, as they claim to be. It is quite possible that the Kallar are not a homogeneous caste, but more a conglomeration of individuals of different castes. For according to their own traditions they were formerly soldiers who with the cessation of the wars were disbanded and had to find other employment.

At present the Kallar are farmers and lead a fairly sedentary life; some of them act as watchmen or carry paddy from village to village for sale as supplementary occupations.

But in the past they were known for their criminal activities; they lived like the Rohillas of the Punjab and the Ramoshis of Maharashtra and had a bad reputation as dacoits, burglars, cattle-lifters and petty thieves. Until 1947 the Kallar were classified as a "Criminal Caste" and were kept under strict police supervision.

Though the Kallar are not Harijans, they keep much to themselves; they usually live in closed settlements, each settlement inhabited by kinsmen and agnates. The settlement is also a cultic unit having its specific gods and shrines. An empty space in the centre of the hamlet is reserved for communal meetings and activities. Matters of caste discipline, cases of litigation, disputes and quarrels, are all here discussed either by the caste council or by the whole male community.

The Kallar are divided into a number of endogamous sub-divisions which are again sub-divided into several lineages. They have no clan system. There is also an "impure group," the Pulukkar, who seem to be descendants of parents living in irregular marriage unions. They are treated as outcastes and must marry among themselves.

From their military past the Kallar have retained certain alien cus-

toms: they have a love for hunting, they keep weapons like the spear and a curved piece of wood like a boomerang. Some sections practise circumcision. But in modern time they tend to conform as much as possible to the rules of Hindu life. They worship the local Hindu gods though they have preserved the worship of their own village and lineage deities.

The Kallar eat meat except beef and drink liquor. They allow widow remarriage and divorce. The marriage ties are rather loose.

The Maravans, found in Madurai and Tinnevely districts of Tamilnad, resemble the Kallar much in their habits and origin. They are now settled cultivators, but in former times they were known for their warlike disposition. They have a long military tradition and gave the British a lot of trouble when they pacified the country. When the Maravans lost their employment as soldiers, they often took to cattle lifting, robbery and other criminal pursuits, while the majority were able to acquire land for cultivation. Some of the leaders even became feudal chiefs and small Rajas.

In spite of their criminal reputation, the Maravans have not been socially degraded by the Hindus. They would not have tolerated such a treatment. Moreover, since many are land-owners and some even land-lords, such affluency assured them a fairly good social status in South Indian village life.

This short chapter shows that the criminal castes of India are far from uniform in their cultural and social standard. Their past has much influenced their present position in the eyes of the Indian people with whom they live. There are criminal castes of a good social status—those who can successfully claim that they descended from Rajputs or even Brahmins, though a cruel fate has deprived them of their home and all their possessions. They have become criminals in defiance of a human society which stripped them bare and gave them no chance to recover their losses. Then there are castes which in the past formed the large armies or the even larger numbers of camp-followers in the armies. When peace came all these people lost their livelihood and many found it difficult to change over to peaceful pursuits. These castes do not enjoy high rank, but they are not Harijans. At the bottom of the scale are just those castes which find it difficult to make ends meet and supplement their meagre resources by occasional thefts and robberies. These castes are often treated as untouchables.

But all these castes set themselves apart from Indian society and usually lead a life of their own, preferring the society of their own

caste fellows and keeping aloof from the others as far as possible. They are not untouchables, but they do not want to be touched. And Indian society, especially Hindu society, leaves them severely alone once their caste classification gets known. For Hindus know that caste traditions change slowly and if a caste has the stigma of a criminal reputation, individual members of such a caste find it extremely hard to lead an honest life and to dispel such a reputation.

CHAPTER 3

Semi-Nomadic Castes

There are a number of semi-nomadic castes which by their very occupations are forced to change their habitats frequently. Their unsteadiness has other consequences which, in turn, impair their social status considerably. Their frequent change of residence keeps these castes away from the closely-knit village society; it forces them often not to be particular in their choice of food and housing; it often does not allow them to choose clean and hygienic places for their living; the closeness of their temporary and flimsy sleeping quarters stimulates illicit sexual liaisons; it also encourages other criminal tendencies; it sets these semi-nomads apart in religion, for their occupation and their frequent change of quarters do not allow them to follow the routine of rituals and the cycle of celebrations on feast days to which the villagers are used. Thus they easily gain the bad reputation of being disinterested in religion and practical unbelievers. Rarely getting the opportunity of visiting a temple, they may finally be even deliberately turned away from the temple and forbidden to enter it—a sign of untouchability!

The very otherness of living and working sets these semi-nomads apart from the ordinary village community and may result in their reduction to the status of low caste, if not of a Harijan.

To this category of semi-nomadic workmen belong men who carry out the following occupations: Work in stone, lime and salt, earth work and well-digging, fishing, boating and portage, basket and mat weaving, hawking and trading.

1. Stone, Salt and Lime Workers

In many regions of India the stone, salt and lime workers were originally fishermen who were forced to take up these jobs as subsi-

diary sources of income. But even those who work in these occupations as their main and only profession claim to descend originally from fishermen.

In general all fishermen and boatmen seem to be ready also to work in stone, salt and lime, and to do all kinds of field-work. But some who are now exclusively engaged in one of these trades have separated from the original caste and become endogamous.

Thus the Binds are such a caste. They are a large, obviously pre-Aryan caste settled in northern India, in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and West Bengal. In Bihar they are generally daily labourers. Elsewhere they are mainly engaged in cultivation, well-digging and other earth-work. But they are also fishermen, mat and basket makers, salt makers and grave diggers. In the past they were also palanquin bearers.

They practise polygamy and levirate. In many places they are regarded as socially impure due to their unclean food habits. Only in Bengal they hold a higher rank and Maithili Brahmins perform religious rites for them. They are divided into two sub-sections, which are again sub-divided into exogamous clans (*mul*). In Uttar Pradesh the Binds are again higher in rank than in Bihar, whether they fish or work in the fields.

The Luniyas or Nuniyas (15,671 in 1961) are now an almost independent functional caste. They have apparently separated from the Chains. They are mainly engaged in cultivation, extraction of saltpetre and salt, but do also various kinds of earth-work. They have a reputation of being pickpockets whenever the occasion arises. Socially they rank with the Kurmis or Koiris. They are not Harijans.

The Nuniyas of eastern Uttar Pradesh have since the latter part of the 19th century made use of new economic opportunities by switching over from salt-making to well and tank digging and road making. They also engage in brick and tile making. This type of work is generally quite remunerative.

Since the improvement of their economic condition the Nuniyas have felt the ambition to rise in social rank. They now call themselves Chauhan and claim Rajput status. They wear the sacred thread (*janew*) though the landlords initially objected to this and beat them up.

On the west coast there are two castes of salt workers who also were compelled largely to take to other trades. The Kharwis of Gujarat are now sailors and tile-turners, while originally they belonged to

the Kharol or Rehgar caste of Rajasthan who still work in salt, both on the coast and on Sambhar lake.

The Agris, also known as Agale or Kharpatil, may also come originally from Rajasthan. They are now principally found in Thana, Kolaba and Janjira districts of Maharashtra. They have no sufficient chances for earning their livelihood by salt manufacture which, as their name suggests, was their original trade, and many are now cultivators with small holdings. They are excellent cultivators of saltland rice. The poorer ones among them are agricultural labourers or seek employment in Bombay mills. In recent times, the Agri caste community has encouraged the education of its younger generation with the result that already a number of Agris have secured fairly high positions in the fields of business and education.

The Agris claim Kshatriya rank, but their small stature and dark complexion, their love for liquor and their belief in non-Brahmin gods betray them as a pre-Aryan community. They have no exogamous clans, but families with the same surname and who observe common mourning do not usually intermarry. An Agri may marry his mother's brother's daughter. Polygamy and divorce are permitted, as also widow marriage. Brahmin priests serve them for marriage and funeral ceremonies. Agris practise cremation as well as burial.

The Agris extend their range far to the north of Maharashtra, even to south-eastern Panjab. They claim that their name derives from their original home around Agra. But the name could also come from the word *ag*, fire. In the north the Agris rank with the lower farming castes. In some parts they are held to be a sub-section of the Luniyas, though they claim to be a separate caste.

The Chunaris, or lime burners, and the Soregars, saltpetre makers, are obviously sub-sections of the Binds or Agris, but have made themselves independent.

In Bengal, however, the Baitis, who burn shells into lime, rank among the impure castes though the product of their labour does not pollute those who make use of it. But they are also mat makers, weavers, dancers and beggars. This may betray their original descent and be the cause of their social degradation. Many Baitis are today daily labourers employed in field work. Most of the Baitis are Hindus and belong to the Vaishnava sect, while a few have embraced Islam. Though they belong to the lowest impure castes in Bengal, degraded Brahmins officiate for them. They are also served by barbers and washermen. Sometimes they are called Chumavis or Chumian.

A caste of earth and salt workers, the Upparas, is found chiefly in Mysore District. But now sea-salt is cheaper and the production of earth-salt has declined. Thus few of the workers in the caste can follow their original calling. Their chief occupations now are cultivation and casual labour. Many are brick-layers in the towns, some are limekiln burners and some others engage in tank repairs and similar work. The last of these have the name Keriband Upparas.

In Kolar, Bangalore and parts of Tumkur, they speak Telugu and in other parts of Kanara they speak Kannada. They are probably identical with the Uppalingas of Tamilnad. The Telugu speaking Upparas do not intermarry with the Kannada speaking ones. Each section is further sub-divided into numerous exogamous clans named after animals, plants, trees and other inanimate objects. They seem to be of totemistic origin.

Marriage is usually between adults, though in the towns infant marriage is nowadays quite common. Widow marriage and divorce are permitted. The dead are usually buried. Their priests are Santanis. Upparas are Vaishnavas by religion. Their caste god is Channakesava. They also worship most of the village deities in the region in which they reside. Their usual caste titles are Setti and Gauda.

2. *Earth Workers and Well Diggers*

These occupational castes are known under various names though they may have the same origin. In physical appearance all the sub-sections occupied in this type of work are similar. Striking is their very dark complexion. It is impossible to reconstruct their original language because they have everywhere adopted the regional dialects though they speak them rather imperfectly. Through their skill and hard work and the type of work they do they really should occupy a fairly high social position. But this is unfortunately not the case; they are very low, for the reason perhaps that they eat any type of food, even vermin, and are rather dirty in their habits.

One of these castes is called Odh or Oudhia. The name would suggest that their original home is Oudh or Odrai (the ancient name for Orissa). But they are most probably from western India and Rajasthan. They are vagrants, wandering about with their families in search of employment on earth-work. They will not, as a rule, take petty jobs, but prefer small contracts on roads, canals, railways and the like, or will build a house of adobe, and dig a tank or a well.

They settle down in temporary reed huts on the edge of the work; the men dig while the women carry the earth to the donkeys which they always have with them, and the children drive the donkeys to the spoil-bank.

In the Salt-Range Tract they also quarry and carry stone; and in parts of north-western India they are said to be wandering pedlars. They eat anything and everything for which reason they are regarded as very impure. Even those who have been converted to Islam are still regarded as outcastes.

They claim Rajput or Kshatriya origin and those who are Hindus worship Rama and Shiva as their main gods. Many are Muslims but have never been fully converted.

They are fairly evenly distributed over the Punjab, but are more concentrated around Lahore, and along the lower Indus and Chanab. They seem to prefer the plains and to avoid the hills.

One section, in the upper part of the Jumna valley, has given up its traditional avocation of earth-work and taken to weaving coarse cotton wrappers, with cultivation as a supplementary occupation.

Another sub-section of the caste, however, has taken to crime and disdains any other profession, trade or business.

A tribe of similar type is that of the Koras or Khairas residing largely in Bihar and West Bengal. In 1951 they numbered 43,460. Earlier references to the Kora tribe were made by Risley (1891) who believed that they were an offshoot of the Munda tribe. S.C. Roy (1915) suggested that they were originally Oraons, specialising in earth-work, raising embankments, etc., but Grierson states that their language is derived from Mundari. However, in other regions they speak languages akin to Kurukhi or Bengali.

The Koras work as agricultural labourers or on jobs like road construction and repair. For their labour they are paid in cash, and sometimes in paddy, etc. A few of them collect fuel which they sell, or edible roots and tubers in the jungle. Some earn their living as fishermen.

Their society is based on a patrilineal exogamous clan system. The clans are totemistic. The totems—animals and trees—are taboo, and the taboos are strictly observed.

The customary marriage is by bride-wealth; it is very early, before puberty, and arranged by the parents. Another way of getting married is by kidnapping a girl. Widow marriage is permitted.

The Koras have a village council headed by a *mukhia* and assisted

by village elders; the council discusses social and religious matters, punishes violations of the caste rules, etc.

The Koras believe in deities and spirits, benevolent and malicious, whom they worship or appease regularly by the sacrifice of fowls and goats. The deities are often believed to reside in large old trees which are therefore preserved. All this would indeed suggest a certain affinity of their culture with that of the Mundas. But the Koras have also adopted many Hindu customs and employ Brahmins as their priests. These Brahmins have, however, been excommunicated by their caste fellows for serving such a low caste.¹

One more caste shares with the Oudhias (or Odias) the work of the navvy, namely, the Beldars or the wielders of the *bel* (mattock). This caste, too, works at both stone and earth. It is perhaps just a sub-section of the Oudhias, a separate territorial group, for the Beldars of Bihar and Oudh have an Od sub-caste and also eat rats. In the Punjab too the two communities are regarded as identical, 'Beldar' being merely a functional title. But in the Punjab they are not treated as untouchables.² In Bihar and the adjoining regions, however, the Beldars are believed to be a branch of the Nuniyas, the saltpetre workers, who, in turn, are an offshoot of the labouring caste of the Binds. The Bengal section of the Beldars work mainly in the coal-mines or as agricultural day labourers. Like the Oudhias, the Beldars carry on their heads the earth excavated and will not degrade themselves by placing the basket upon their back or shoulders. The Koras, on the contrary who are their only rivals in this type of work, despise the Beldars for not using the shoulder-pole and carrying two baskets at once. All the same, the Beldars hold the higher position and employ for their religious rites a better class of Brahmins (Maithili). They are, however, more addicted to liquor than the Koras.

A few other castes have taken to earth-work as their profession, but they are chiefly small sub-sections of large castes, such as the Bavariyas, who traditionally follow other callings.

In Maharashtra members of these castes are called Vadari. They are without permanent homes, but settle temporarily wherever earth or stone work is required and they can get profitable employment.

¹R. Ghosh, 1966, 81-6.

²In the Punjab they are either Hindus or Muslims, but it does not make much difference to them as they are not very staunch in any of the two faiths.

They live in small tents (*raoti*) of reeds and grass on a frame-work of bamboo sticks. The Vadaris rear pigs which they eat or sell. The pigs clean the village of rubbish and thus render a service to the villagers. They also keep dogs, to watch their tents, and donkeys to carry the excavated earth and stones. They practise child-marriage, widow-marriage, have polygamy and admit divorce. They worship their own gods and do not employ Brahmins for their religious ceremonies. They eat all kinds of meat, except beef, but pork and the flesh of rats. They do not accept cooked food from Harijans, such as Mahars and Dhers, but the Hindus do not associate with them. In Maharashtra they do not habitually prostitute their married and unmarried women.

Mill-stones and crushing stones for various purposes are manufactured by the Pathrats (i.e., Patharvat, a stone-dresser). They are found mainly in Akola District. They have a tradition that their ancestor had five sons of whom the eldest became a Pathrat, the next eldest a blacksmith, the third a carpenter, the fourth a brass and copper smith while the youngest became a goldsmith. This tradition may indicate that the origin of the stone-workers and that of the smiths and carpenters is the same. The Pathrats take food from a carpenter and a potter, but not from an oil-presser or washerman. They worship the local deities and have a strong belief in witchcraft. The Pathrats permit widow marriage, but no divorce. A widow can remarry only once. If her second husband also dies, she must remain a widow.

The salt-makers of northern Maharashtra are called Lonari. A Lonari accepts cooked food from a Kunbi, but not from a smith or carpenter.

In the south of India, where these castes are very numerous, they are called Ottar or Otte in Tamil, Vaddar in Telugu and Vodda in Canarese. These names are said to be connected with Odra, the ancient name of Orissa, their old home country. But all of them, even those in Tamilnad and Kanara, speak Telugu among themselves. They have the reputation of being very ignorant and dull of understanding. Their caste name has thus come to signify in common parlance an uncouth, rude and uncivilised person.

In Kanara they are divided into three endogamous sections which follow different occupations. One which is generally working in stone, also manufactures grinding stones and other stone articles for domestic use. The second section is that of nomadic earth-workers. They prefer jobs on long undertakings. They usually work

together in their own gangs, by the piece, in the manipulation of which they are very adept. They work expertly with their long spades, and no unskilled labourer can compete with them, whether on surface work or in well sinking. The women work as hard as the men.

As a side-line they snare and kill wild pigs, and they are often employed by the farmers to rid their crops, sugarcane, etc., of these pests. It is alleged that they are not averse occasionally to indulge in dacoity.

The third section was in former times engaged in the salt trade, and they carried the salt on bullocks from one place to the other. This trade has now declined and many of the section are now employed as sweepers in municipality towns.

Each section of the caste is further divided into exogamous clans which show traces of a totemistic origin. Marriage is usually adult. Widow marriage and divorce are permitted. The Voddas worship the local deities, but rarely visit temples though they are not barred from entering them. They have the custom of dedicating a number of girls as Basavis to the temple service and to prostitution. The women are generally untidy and devoid of ornaments. Satani priests are officiating for their religious needs.

Socially they are of low status, but not impure. Their touch is not polluting. Barbers and washermen serve them, and barbers even pare their nails. But both castes refuse to render their services at a Vodda wedding. They may draw water from public wells, but only Madigas and Malas, or Holeyas and Kuruchas accept cooked food from their hands.

It is said that they have some unusual customs. A youth, for instance, grows a beard until he gets married. On his wedding day he shaves it off. During the pregnancy of his wife a Vodda will not breach a tank or carry a corpse. When a pregnant woman works she gets an extra share, the additional share being intended for the child in her womb.

In Andhra Pradesh and in Tamilnad earth-work is carried out by the Upparas in Andhra, and the Uppalingas or Uppiliyans in Tamilnad. Though originally salt and saltpetre miners, they are now mainly engaged in the digging of wells and the construction of dams and tanks. In the past the construction of dams and tanks was considered a highly meritorious work by the mighty and wealthy. Thus the castes engaged in this type of work were in great demand. The salt miners had to change their occupation to earth-work when the Madras

Salt Act of 1889 made the mining of salt by private individuals a criminal offence. The colonial administration was not bothered with the fact that so many families became jobless when this Act was promulgated!

3. *Fishermen, Boating and Porter Castes*

India is a land of mighty rivers, but few big lakes. It has a coast line of 5,700 km. This peculiar geographical setting provides ample opportunities for a large population earning their livelihood by fishing.

In Hindu tradition (Manu X, 48) the fishermen are listed as the offspring of a mixed union between a Brahmin father and a Shudra woman. Thus they are called Nishadas or Antyaja, and have to live outside the caste system. They also fell into contempt because they were professionally engaged in killing live animals. But in Vedic literature the Nishadas are described as aboriginal tribes. This is most probably the correct description. However, once associated with Hindu society they were fitted out with an Aryan genealogy, and to explain their low status as outcastes, they were given a Brahmin father and a Shudra mother.

Since they were tribal people, fishing was just one of various methods for providing food, and if the environment was suitable—as it was in many regions no doubt—fishing must have become a most welcome and profitable source of livelihood. But when these tribes were drawn into and gradually accepted and assimilated by Hindu society, they assumed the status of castes which specialised in fishing as their main occupation. Naturally they became localised along the many rivers in the interior as river fishers and along the coast as ocean fishers.

Due to the caste system, peculiar to India, these fishermen adopted fishing as an almost exclusive occupation which was then inherited from father to son. It has formed and shaped not only their economic, but also their social and religious life. Only the so-called aboriginal tribes regard fishing rather a subsidiary source of livelihood, and even a pastime and sport.

When the fishing castes increased in population, or when fish became scarce in some regions, a substantial number of fishermen were forced by necessity to abandon fishing and seek other occupations. Nearest in line were boating and sea-faring. Thus new castes came

into existence now specialising in the new trades and slowly growing apart from their original fishing community.

The boatmen and sailors not only plied their vessels, they also carried loads to and from the boats, not only goods but also passengers. Moreover, in those days when bridges were non-existing, loads and passengers had to be carried across and out to a boat on the sea. This resulted in a new profession, that of ferrymen and porters. Some of the porters left the river or sea altogether, carrying loads over land or persons in palanquins (*palki*). In the early days travelling by palanquin was the only alternative to walking, riding or proceeding by bullock cart, and those who could afford to be carried in palanquins did so often as a matter of prestige, if not of necessity.

Though carrying goods and passengers was certainly a servile occupation, and entailed a loss of social prestige, it could not result in untouchability. Palanquin bearers and ferrymen could not be kept at a distance, as other servile castes. If their touch had been contaminating, crossing rivers and travelling by palanquin would have been impossible. Thus the high-caste Hindus had to make an exception with these particular low castes.

And it was convenient in those days of travelling by palanquin that the porters—former fishermen—rendered other services too. They had to fetch water, prepare food and shelter for the night. Consequently they had to be pure enough so that even Brahmins could accept water and food from their hands.

In the time of the British Raj fishermen often became the domestic servants of British officers, merchants and clerks. From this time might come the use of the word 'boy' or 'bearer' for a house servant. The word 'boy' was really 'Bhoi', the caste name of the fishermen, while 'bearer' meant a palanquin carrier, or a porter.¹

The next step naturally was to recognise the fisher caste as well as the caste of sailors and porters as public cooks. Thus in the north and west of India to which this evolution mainly applies, the members of the fishing castes were qualified to work as cooks as their profession. Some specialised in parching grain and preparing sweetmeats for the public, and selling them in shops. These new occupations resulted in the creation of new castes which, though originally one, have now separated so completely that they do no more inter-

¹Others derive the word 'bearer' from the Bengali word *vihara* or *bihari* which has its origin in the Sanskrit word *vya vihara*, domestic servant.

dine and intermarry.

All this shows that the fishing communities in India have developed a great variety of ethnic, economic, social and religious peculiarities which certainly make them a fascinating subject for study.

While in regions where fishermen, boatmen and palanquin carriers receive exceptional treatment because of their usefulness and the peculiar service they render, in other regions the same castes are still treated as low castes and even as untouchables, especially in West Bengal and Kerala. After all, the great Hindu law-giver Manu had classified them as Nishadas or Antyajas. As Nishadas they are not entitled to wear the sacred thread of the twice-born and to undergo the initiation ceremony (*upanayana*).

The fishermen are regarded as low also because they are professionally engaged in taking life. Hindus regard all kinds of living creatures as sacred and their killing as sinful.

Moreover, fish-eating is prohibited in many high castes. Those who eat fish are generally socially inferior to those who abstain from it. And the lower the castes whom the fishermen serve, the lower is their own social status.

Certain kinds of fish are particularly sacred and should not be killed at all. The veneration of fish is associated with the incarnation of Vishnu in a fish—*Matsya avatar*. In this his first incarnation the god Vishnu saved the Vedas from a giant who had stolen and swallowed them. When he hid himself in the depth of the sea Vishnu turned himself into a fish, dived into the ocean, killed the giant, ripped open his belly and rescued the Vedas. At the same time he also saved Manu, the progenitor of the human race, from drowning in a universal flood.¹

It is quite a common thing to see Brahmins, in memory of this saving of the Vedas, throwing rice to fishes in rivers and ponds. Where Brahmins exercise authority, they forbid fishing altogether.

While fishing expeditions of the aboriginal tribes are not seldom carried out in large teams, so that often the whole village community takes part in them, in a festive mood, as an enjoyable sport, the professional river fishers generally fish singly or in small teams. On the whole these fishermen are great individualists, independent, carefree, living a healthy out-door and free life, satisfied with their small earnings, often going hungry when the catch was small, occasionally exchanging their surplus catch for small commodities, cereals, clothes.

¹W. J. Wilkins, 1882/1975, 134-41.

or other necessities. The ocean fishers, on the other hand, are generally organised in bigger teams, employed and often exploited by the wealthy owners of the large boats or by the big fish merchants.

The life of the fishermen is hard and often dangerous; they are exposed to the vagaries of the weather, to sudden storms and floods. But they love the water and their calling. Generally they are hard-working, frugal, hard-drinking and loud-mouthed, extrovert, quarrelsome, but generous and loyal to their family and community. Women, because of the important work they contribute, have a good standing in the community.

The lot of the fishermen who by adverse circumstances of life have been forced to give up their calling and to seek other ways of earning their livelihood is far less happy; it is a life of hard work no less, but in utter dependence on the employer, in endless drudgery, for starvation wages and with no scope for personal initiative.

The methods of fishing naturally differ in ocean and inland fishing. The methods of river fishing are more or less the same all over India. We can distinguish between fishing by erecting a dam, by poisoning the water, by drying the stream-bed, by fishing with traps, with nets, by shooting fish with bow and arrow, or with a gun, or by exploding gelignite in a pond. Fishing is done by nets especially by the professional fishermen, or with hook and bait. Fish may even be caught with bare hands.

It goes without saying that there are many local variations in the fishing methods of the tribals and the professional fishermen, but the differences are slight. Significant is perhaps the preference of the professional fishermen for net fishing, while the tribals are more inclined to use the other methods. The reason probably is that the professional fishermen know better how to knit nets and fish more or less throughout the year, while the tribals fish mainly in certain seasons, especially during the monsoon.

For our study we will group the fishermen in geographical sections, the fishermen of northern India, of north-eastern India, of central India, of western India and of southern India. We must also distinguish between inland river fishers and ocean fishers.

1. The Fishermen of North India

In this region we include, somewhat arbitrarily perhaps, the States of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Uttar

Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The fishermen of this vast area go under the collective name of Kahar. They are divided into numerous sub-divisions which have specialised in various occupations connecting with fishing, boating and the water. The most prominent castes of fishermen are the Jhinwar, the Machhi, Bhatyara, Bharbhunja and Mallah. Originally they all seem to have belonged to the same racial group and even to the same caste. Only the names differ in various regions; the other differences are slight.

In Kashmir the fishermen are called Hanji. They earn their living, however, mainly as boatmen. They are important for the country because the river is the great highway of the country and thus much of the traffic of persons and goods is in their hands. They have several types of boats, from stately house-boats, large barges for goods to small shooting punts. The Hanjis use a single heart-shaped paddle.

They live a large part of the year on their boats, usually in the after-part which is covered with matting. There they live, cook and sleep.

Another sub-section of the Kahar is called Jiur; in Dardistan, they go under the name Kremin. They earn their living as porters. They carry their loads on the shoulder, not on the head. They also manage the flour-mills worked by water.

The social position of these castes is low, on the same level with the barbers and other menial castes, but they are not untouchables.

In the Punjab the fishermen are called Jhinwar while more to the west they are called Machhi. Being essentially fishermen and living on the water, they form quite a large portion of the local population in a country traversed by large rivers. But even in these regions many fishermen have been forced to abandon their traditional calling and they now earn their livelihood as field labourers, watermen, domestic servants and cooks.

Thus the Jhinwars are porters, watermen, fishermen, and basket-makers. In the past they carried palanquins and they still carry heavy loads, preferably on a yoke over the shoulders. They are closely connected with water and many are engaged in the cultivation of water-nuts and the netting of water-fowl. Their social standing is that of a low caste, but at the top of this category.¹

In the Himalayan mountains a special caste is assigned to provide passage across the rivers. Thus in Kulu the Darchis are professional

¹D. Ibbetson, 1916, 303.

swimmers. They use inflated buffalo skins to ferry passengers and goods across the rivers and to float logs of wood down the rivers. They are employed by forest contractors. Their work is difficult and dangerous. The Darchis are low in social rank and are below the masons and carpenters, though above the Barchis, who are fellers of trees and wood cutters.

The professional swimmers and ferrymen of Mandi District are called Darain. They too use inflated buffalo skins (*darai*) to ferry passengers and goods across the unbridged rivers. Those who float timber down to the plains are called Ghalu. They probably belong to the Dumna caste who are bamboo workers. Among the low castes they claim a high position. They have their own priests who like to be called Brahmins and be treated as such because of their special calling.

In Mahasu District the ferrymen are called Taru. They take passengers across the rivers on inflated buffalo skins (*mashak*). If there is only one buffalo skin, the passenger has to lie across the ferryman's back. But it is more comfortable to cross on two *mashaks* tied together and a bedstead on them. Such a ferry is paddled by two men who use their oars and legs to guide the ferry across.

In Simla District the fishermen and boatmen are called Mallah and Dasin. Since they are not particular about their food and eat anything, they are of low social status and even Kanets treat them as outcastes. Even in the Himalayan regions fishing has become now-a-days a subsidiary occupation; it cannot support a family anymore. Thus the fishermen have to search for other occupations, and work as boatmen, ferrymen, porters, and daily labourers, on the road and in the towns and market places.

According to the Census of 1961 two thousand families of fishermen were returned from Rajasthan. But they too find it difficult to support themselves on fishing and gradually shift to other occupations.

In the northern region a fishing industry on modern lines is still largely undeveloped. The Indian Government claims that the initial outlay for building up such a fishing industry would be high, as many reservoirs would have to be built. On the other hand, a large part of the population in northern India is strictly vegetarian and thus there is not sufficient demand for fish, while those classes which eat fish cannot afford to purchase fish regularly.

Still, a beginning has been made. So far 128 reservoirs with a capacity of 225,000 acres have been leased out annually. The fish contrac-

tors of Rajasthan export fish to Agra, Delhi and Calcutta. Fish is also sold locally in small quantities at Jaipur and Ajmer. The labourers employed in these modern fisheries have mostly been imported from outside districts and are not fishermen by tradition.

2. *The Fishermen of North-eastern India*

This region includes the States of Bihar, West Bengal, Assam and Orissa. The mountainous parts of this region are peopled by a large population of tribals fond of fishing and fish-eating. Some of these tribes perform annually ceremonious fishing expeditions surrounded with religious rites.

Fish caught during the monsoon are generally dried and stored against a day when food is scarce. In this region there are plenty of rivers, tanks and reservoirs and the supply of fish is considerable not only for domestic consumption but also for sale in the market.

In this region most tribes fish as described in the introduction. Here a few instances might be given. The Bodos of Assam, for instance, catch fish in the neighbouring streams as a welcome change in their monotonous diet. The Bodo women generally catch fish during their leisure hours.

Another tribe, the Lushai Kukis, fish with the ordinary casting net. Sometimes they spear them by torchlight in the night. The fish are attracted by the light. They also build weirs in streams, lead the water through bamboo chutes inserted in the weir. The fish get caught in the traps and cannot escape against the strong onrush of the water. These weirs are constructed by the combined efforts of the whole village community, and the fish caught are distributed according to custom among all taking part in the fishing. The Lushai Kukis also use poison which they pour into pools. The fish are stupefied by the poison and float to the surface where they are easily caught.

Besides these fishing activities in the tribal areas, carried out as subsidiary occupations, seasonally and partly in sport and recreation, there is systematic fishing done by professional fishermen settled in this region along the big rivers. In recent years large number of displaced fishermen from Bangla Desh have been settled in north-eastern India. These fishermen are experts with a long tradition in fishing. Their whole culture has been formed by this main occupation of theirs. The fishing industry in north-eastern India has much improved through this influx of professional fishermen, and substantially more

fish has been thrown on the market. The demand for fish is very great in this region and practically all castes eat fish.

The main source for fish production is in the rivers, their tributaries and in ponds. On the Brahmaputra the fishing season lasts for nearly eight months. Practically no fishing can be done during the monsoon when the river is often in spate. There is reason to fear that the strongly intensified fishing activity in the rivers of north-eastern India might soon exhaust the natural supply of fish.

The professional fishermen of this region are fairly well-organised. There are cooperative societies which help them to get leases, give them financial credit and market their catches.

More towards the west, in West Bengal and Bihar, a strong tribal population can be found for which fishing is an important subsidiary source of food supply. Almost all the tribes are keen fishermen, especially during the monsoon. They practise communal fishing, but fish also as individuals using all the various methods of catching fish common among tribals.

But there are also castes of fishermen in this area whose main traditional occupation is fishing. Such castes are spread all over the north-eastern part of India.

One such caste is that of the Mallahs. But they are not only fishermen, they are now boatmen and ferrymen. In Bihar river traffic is important in the north and south. The Ganges and Gogra and their tributaries flow through the State. Where bridges are lacking, the Mallahs do ferry service. They also carry passengers and goods in the boats on the rivers. Sometimes the safety of the passengers is endangered by the Mallahs, either through lack of skill in handling the boats, or through overloading them out of greed. The Government of Bihar has so far not exercised any control over the inland water transport. Thus accidents happen rather frequently, especially during the annual fairs and pilgrimages when big crowds clamour for transport. The river landing places also are often in a deplorable condition. The ravages of floods, especially in the monsoon, can often be repaired only with difficulty and at high cost.

Another traditional fisher and boatmen caste is that of the Kewats or Keyots (ancient name: Kaivarta or Kaibartta). The caste is found in Oudh and Bihar, in Bengal and in Orissa. The Kewats probably belong to the same racial stock as the Malos and Tiyars, which are fishing castes more to the east. In Oudh and Bihar they are now mainly engaged in cultivation which gives them reason to claim a

superior status to the caste fellows still engaged as porters and domestic servants. Those latter in turn hold themselves superior to the fishermen plying their trade on the rivers. In West Bengal the Jalia sub-section of the Kewats are still fishermen partly; the rest do fieldwork. They also work as servants to high-caste people. Many are engaged as messengers and watchmen. Some more enterprising Kewats trade in fish; they buy it from the fishermen and sell it to the fish mongers. In Orissa the caste is still engaged in actual fishing.

The Chasi Kewats who have completely abandoned fishing and live exclusively by cultivation, have changed their caste name to Mahishya and disclaim any relationship with the Jalia Kaivartas.

Their social status is not too bad; they are on the same level as the low agricultural castes, the Kurmis, Koiris and Dhanuks. Brahmins accept water and sweetmeats from their hands. In religion they are rather orthodox Hindus since they are anxious to rise socially. But they still worship also some deities of their own, in particular a snake god.

The Malos are a similar fishing and boating caste, probably indigenous to the Gangetic Delta region. Apart from fishing and boating, they are engaged in making twine, in land cultivation and in selling grocery. Their social status is quite low, and on the same level with the Tiarys. It is lower than that of the Kewats. As a rule the Malos belong to the Vaishnava sect, but they pay special veneration to the great rivers on which they live and which provide their livelihood. At regular seasons of worship, they also pay homage to their nets and boats.

Another fishing community, in West Bengal and Orissa, is the Kendra caste, closely related to the Kodma caste. Both castes live by fishing but also as daily labourers and village watchmen. Their social status is low. But in recent times Brahmins have started to officiate in their religious feasts. The Kendras are Vaishnavas, but venerate also the usual village deities.

The Konais are another West Bengal fishing caste. Their Ghasi sub-section has taken to cultivation though many are still fishermen and daily labourers. Their Kurariar sub-section find employment as drummers, dealers in hide and as daily labourers. Though the Ghasi Konais are strict in the observance of the Hindu food regulations, their social status has not been raised; it is still low. The Kurariar are not particular in the food they eat; their social status is still lower.

The Patni (ferryman) caste is also employed in fishing and boating.

But Patnis also work as basket-makers, cultivators and field servants. Some are engaged in trade. Socially they are quite low, but hope to be elevated to the rank of Kewats, through abandoning boating and turning to cultivation.

Other small fishing castes of West Bengal are the Gonhris, Pods, Berams, Chains and Chasis. They usually combine fishing with agriculture; some of them are traders. Their social status is low though they are orthodox in their Hindu observances.

All these castes, especially in Bihar, call themselves also Mallahs, an Arabic designation for a fisherman. It is significant that just in this area the social status of the fishing communities is so low.

3. The Fishermen of Central India

By central India we understand mainly Madhya Pradesh and the north-western part of Maharashtra. This region is quite hilly; the main range passing through the area from east to west is called the Vindhyas. There is a shorter parallel range—the Satpuras. Big rivers pass through central India: the Nerbada, the Tapti and the Chambal, with numerous tributaries. While in the dry season the water-level even in the big rivers sinks considerably, the smaller rivers sometimes dry up completely and only deeper pools keep their water.

In the hills of central India a number of tribes have their home; the two most important ones are the Gonds and the Bhils, each of them being more than three million strong. The tribes are of various racial and cultural level, but all of them are keen fishermen though no tribe earns its livelihood exclusively by fishing.

Fishing is for these tribes merely an occasional and subsidiary enterprise. As for the tribes of northern and north-eastern India, fishing has also for the tribes of central India a great economic and social importance. Yet it is not a main occupation; it does not leave any significant mark on their culture. The fishing methods of the central Indian tribals differ little from those of the more northern and north-eastern tribes.

The main professional fishing castes of eastern central India are the Bhois or Kahars, the Dhimars, Injhvars and Naodas. Besides these we find in central India also the Kewats, Mallahs, Machhis and other castes already described.

Thus in the northern portion of central India we find the Bhois who might be identical with the Kahars of northern India. In this region the Bhois were in the past the watermen and palanquin

carriers. From this function they advanced to regular domestic service in better-class Hindu homes. Some Kahars refused to clean cooking vessels which slightly improved their social status. When the British came to India and required cooks and personal servants, the Bhois and Dhimars offered their services and were readily accepted. Hence the names 'boy' for Bhoi, and 'bearer' for the palanquin bearer, as names for domestic servants in India.

South of the Bhois we find the Dhimars as quite versatile employees. Primarily they are fishermen and boatmen. Their fishing is done mainly by net. They have a variety of nets which they manufacture themselves. But they also fish by hook. Wherever feasible, they span a long line over the river or stream, with baited hooks attached to it at regular intervals. The line is left for some hours and then drawn in. In this manner the Dhimars are able to catch more fish.

The Dhimars venerate their fishing nets at Diwali. In all other aspects they are Hindus and worship the local deities.

The Dhimars' connection with water has made them the water carriers for the Hindus. The personal servant of a wealthy landlord is also often a Dhimar. Dhimars also work as personal messengers for the wealthy villagers, and even as their cooks. Some sell parched grain and rice on railway stations, and sweet potatoes and boiled plums to people working on the fields in the harvest season.

In the north-western districts of Maharashtra the fishermen and domestic servants, and also many field labourers are the Injhvars. They seem to be an offshoot of the originally tribal Binjhvars who are nowadays almost completely Hinduised and hold a good social position as rather prosperous farmers. But the Injhvars in this region have specialised in fishing and adopted also the occupation as boatmen, hence they are socially lower.

A special caste of boatmen is found on the Narbada river. They call themselves Naoda, from *nao*, the boat. It is their task to row the many pilgrims to the shrine of Shiva on the island Unkaji near Mandhata at the annual festival. They claim to have been Rajputs originally. But this claim is very common and need not be taken seriously. It is certainly not accepted by the local high-castes.

The other fishing castes in the region, such as the Kewats, Mallahs, Machhis and others as immigrants from northern India. They are engaged in much the same occupations as in their home countries West Bengal and Bihar.

All these castes are sweet-water fishermen.

4. *The Fishermen of Western India*

By western India we understand the State of Gujarat and the coastal regions of Maharashtra. In this area fishing is carried on mainly by professional fishermen. River-fishing is of comparatively slight importance. Much more important is ocean fishing for which the area is famous.

The river-fishers of Maharashtra are called Dhivar or Dhimar. They fish in ponds and rivers, some cultivate and sell water-nuts (*singara*) and some are water-carriers. In the past they were also employed as palanquin bearers. They hold a low caste position, they are not untouchables. They may carry water for the higher castes and even cook for them. Nor is their touch polluting. In some regions they are also occupied as sellers of parched grain very popular among the higher castes.

Another river-fishing caste in Maharashtra is that of the Bhois. They live mainly in villages along the rivers. As fishing does often not provide them with full-time employment, they are engaged in agriculture and other jobs.

Fishing in rivers and tanks is done by means of cast nets, drift nets, drag nets and hook and line. But inland fishing is not well developed in Maharashtra, since plenty of sea-fish is available.

The main ocean fishing castes of this region are the Kolis, the Gabits, the East Indians (who are Kolis, converted to the Christian Faith), and the Kharvas or Kharvis. Around Bombay and north and south of it the main fishing caste is that of the Kolis. They are divided into many sub-divisions which often bear different names and do not interdine and intermarry. Racially the Kolis appear to form one group. They are of slight build and gracile body form, though wiry and enduring. Their facial features are that of the Mediterranean race. Their complexion is rather dark. The women, especially in the bloom of youth, are often very good-looking and slim, but in later age they tend to grow heavy and obese.

They are known for their excitable and fierce temper. They easily pick up quarrels, but they are hard-working, honest and loyal to their family and community.

The Kolis are divided into numerous sub-divisions, not all of which are engaged in fishing. But the ocean fishers in the caste pursue their calling according to traditional methods. Their fishing techniques vary according to the seasons, the type of boats and nets which are at their disposal.

The Son Kolis of Bombay, for instance, have no less than twenty different types of nets and methods of fishing. The nets used in ocean fishing are of three main types: stationary nets, drag nets and cast nets, including those operated single-handedly.

The fishing boats are entirely of teak-wood, fifty to a hundred feet long, fifteen to twenty feet broad and four to eight feet deep. Each boat carries a main mast. The sail is made of thick-canvas. The boat is further fitted with a rudder, a helm and oars.

Fishing on the western coast of India goes on for eight months of the year. During the monsoon fishing stops as it is too dangerous. But by the end of September the fishing season again commences. Each boat contains from twelve to fourteen men and two cooks. Usually all boats of the village go together on an expedition.

The time of a fishing expedition is fixed according to the tides. Two fishing periods of twelve days each occur every lunar month. The boats go at a time which the experienced fishermen deem most suitable. The fishers are usually about twelve hours at sea at a stretch. They generally go out in the evening to the stakes put up on the previous day. On arrival they first haul in the nets, collect the catch, mend the biggest holes in the nets and fix them again for the vat. Meanwhile the cook has prepared a meal consisting of rice and fresh fish. When the nets are fixed, the meal is taken. In the morning the nets are hauled in, and the entire catch of two hauls taken in the boat to the shore.

Once they bring the catch to the shore, their duty and responsibility is over. They leave the boats and go home to have their food and a bath and go to sleep. Now the women take over responsibility. They take charge of the catch, sort it out, take the best to the market on their heads and dry and salt other types of fish and prawns. The whole transaction of selling the fish is their monopoly. At least it was so in the past. Now in many villages contractors buy up the catch and ship it to the market. These contractors, often men of their own caste, usually exploit the fishermen mercilessly. The latter are forced to sell their perishable goods quickly, as cold storage facilities are either non-existent or very inadequate. To save the fishermen from exploitation, they have formed unions and the Government has established cooperatives, but so far few of them work satisfactorily.

Another dream of the fishermen, now only rarely fulfilled, is the ownership of a motor-boat which would save them from the hard work of rowing and allow them to go out further on the ocean.

Ownership of a boat helps them to make more profit, as now a high percentage of the catch goes to the owner of the boat.

The Son Kolis are found along the North Konkan coast from Bassein to Ratnagiri in the south. They are very numerous in Kolaba. They distinguish themselves from all other castes in the region by their mode of dress. Their ornaments too are different. Much of their hard-earned money is spent on drinks and weddings. They are quite hospitable and sociable.

Along with the Kolis, there is another fishing caste on the west coast from Kutch, Saurashtra and South Gujarat down to South Kanara. It is called Kharwar. Many of the Kharwars also find employment as sailors on ships plying the Indian Ocean. Others work as salt carriers. The Kharwars claim Rajput descent, but this claim has little foundation. Their dark complexion, short stocky stature, abundance of beard and body hair, prove their different racial origin. They are fond of fish and meat and drink liquor and toddy to excess. They rarely engage in cultivation. In religion they prefer the cult of female deities. They are full of superstition, and believe firmly in omens, the evil eye and in witchcraft. They venerate the cow, the sun and the moon, and certain trees. But on the other hand they are an adventurous lot and extremely improvident.

The Gabits are an ocean-fishing caste residing on the coast near Ratnagiri south of Bombay. They use to sail with their keeled and outrigger sailing boats to Malpe in South Kanara. Since fish is less abundant on their own coast, competition is keener, and salt more expensive. Moreover, the crystals of Bombay salt are too large for curing and do not agree with the fish of which the flesh is turned black.

The Ratnagiri boats go well out of sight of land to the fishing grounds where they catch seir, pomfret, cat-fish and other big fish, even sharks. But to them the seir is most valuable and lucrative. If fishing at Malpe is not good, the Ratnagiri fishermen sail further south till Mangalore. This is not resented by the local fishermen, as the latter usually do not go out far on the ocean and remain near the coast.

The Muslim fishermen of the region call themselves Daldi (from *dalad*, fishing). They are obviously local people, have the same tall or middle-sized stature, the same brown tint of skin colour and regular features. They are rather unclean and untidy in their manner of living. Many Daldis have given up fishing and are now cultivators, sailors,

servants and petty traders. Their social customs reveal that they are converts from Hinduism. Most of their mosques are in bad repair, yet they are fairly religious. Worship of the Hindu gods is not practised. As Mohammedans they are not treated as low caste people.

The fishing caste further south is that of the Kharvis. The South Canara Manual describes the Kharvis as Maratha fishermen who migrated to their present habitats from Bombay. In Kanara they are ocean fishers and sailors, but they also accept work as domestic servants and daily labourers. Some are engaged in agriculture. In social status they claim to be superior to the Kolis. By religion they are Saivites and disciples of the Sringeri Mutt.

The Kharvis are hardworking but thriftless, and much given to drink, chiefly toddy.

While the ocean fishing industry is fairly well developed in the Bombay area and south of Bombay as far as Goa, fishing along the coast of Gujarat would require further development. Gujarat has a coast line of more than a thousand miles most of which is deeply indented and contains rich fishing grounds. But fishing in this area is undeveloped because of the lack of demand for fish in the population of Gujarat. Religious prejudices and vegetarian food habits so far prohibited eating of fish.

Facilities for export of fish to fish-eating areas and large cities such as Bombay, Ajmer, Jaipur and Delhi are not good. Also, the number of people employed in fishing is so far comparatively small in Gujarat and the fishermen who fish along the coast of Gujarat are too poor to use mechanised boats.

The Government of India is now trying to develop the fishing industry in Gujarat by granting large credits to fishermen wanting to mechanise their boats, by developing the ports and establishing better communications with Bombay and other fish-consuming centres.

Gujarat is also a great potential for the development of molluscan fisheries. A flourishing pearl industry could easily be started. So far very little has been done in this field. There is scope also for window-pane oyster fisheries. Then shell (*chank*) fisheries could produce the type of shells which are very popular among Indians as ornaments.

Pisciculture in inland rivers, tanks and ponds too awaits further development and expansion. It could produce a steady and rich food supply badly needed in India. Cold storage facilities are of course also woefully inadequate in Gujarat.

The traditional fishermen of Goa are called Ramponkar, *rampon* being the Konkani word for a sieve net, which is the net by which up to recent time most of the fish were caught. But cast nets and hand lines are also used for fishing. For *rampon* fishing thirty to seventy individuals or families together own a fishing net that is often their heirloom. Such a sieve net may be five km long and about twenty to twenty-five feet broad. The net has floats on top and small stone weights tied at the bottom so as to keep the net in a vertical position. When a shoal of fish is sighted the net is set up to encircle the fish. For this purpose the fishermen are divided into two groups, about 150 men being necessary to pull in the net. The catch is shared between all the men handling the *rampon*. Goa has about 40,000 fishermen of this type. Their women take the fish to the market for sale.

Gill net fishing is done by a different method. The fishermen, five men to a boat, go out at night to a distance of seven to fifteen km from the shore. Once stationary, they float a one km long net in a vertical position. The fish get entangled in the mesh upto their gills (hence the name gill net) and are removed by hand.

These are the traditional methods of fishing in the Goa waters. But since about fifteen years the mechanisation of the fishing industry has set in in Goa and trawlers are used in increasing numbers for fishing. At present about 400 trawlers are in action. This development has been strongly subsidised by the Government. But it has done much harm to the traditional Ramponkars of Goa because mechanised trawling in shallow waters kills the fish eggs, ruins the breeding grounds and reduces the fish population. The Ramponkars of Goa started an agitation against fishing by trawlers, but the Goan authorities have suppressed the agitation with a heavy hand, for fishing by trawlers brings in welcome foreign exchange.

5. The Fishermen of South India

In the South Indian region are included Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Kanara, Tamilnad and Kerala. Since South India has a long coastline, the fishing castes are numerous and much diversified. But they are divided into two main sections: one is engaged in river and pond fishing, the other in ocean fishing. It is rare that one and the same caste has two sections, one fishing in sweet water, the other in the sea.

(a) In Orissa and Andhra Pradesh

In Orissa and Andhra Pradesh the following castes are engaged in river fishing: Bagat, Bestha, Minalavaru, Majjulu, Chambadi, Kabbili, Kondra and Bhoi. The Mila, Nulia, Odavandlu, Paguththan, Palle, Pattanavada, Pattapu, Salangu-Karan, and Semmadi castes are ocean fishers.

While the fishermen in western central India are in a privileged position with regard to ritual purity and thus able to render personal services to the high castes, in Orissa even the sweet-water fishermen are impure and belong to the untouchable castes though in this group they take the highest position. While some sections are engaged in fishing, others work as tenant farmers or field servants, a few find employment in the towns. Children of these castes often work in the houses of the high-caste families in the garden or graze their cattle. Both men and women are engaged, the men work in the market, the women as house servants. They are a hardworking lot. Also the fishermen who fish in rivers and ponds have to work long hours, exposed to sun and rain.

The Bhois, widespread in central India, are also found in Orissa and Andhra. They are divided into two sections, one engaged in fishing, the other in carrying goods or in domestic service.

Another fishing caste in Orissa, especially in Ganjam District, calls itself Kondra or Kondora. The Kondras fish in ponds, lakes, rivers and backwaters, but never in the ocean. They also catch crabs in the lakes, and sell them. The caste is divided into two endogamous sections, one of which follows the traditional occupation of fishing, while the other has adopted the duties of village watchmen.

The Kondras rank very low in social status, and even the Haddis refuse to beat drums for them, and will not accept partially boiled rice which has been touched by the Kondras.

In Ganjam as well as in Vizagapatam districts the Majjals are also fishermen, but they chiefly live on farming and hunting.

In Ganjam District there are also the Kevutos, probably an offshoot of the Kaibarta fishing caste of Bengal. Besides fishing in rivers, canals and lakes, they ply boats and catamarans. Some of them have taken to other occupations, like trade or cultivation. They are also engaged in selling fried rice or parched grain. Kevutos following these specific occupations have often formed separate sub-castes which do not intermarry anymore.

The Kevutos are low in social rank, but are not a polluting caste.

Oriya Brahmins and Bairagis officiate as their priests. In the Vizagapatam area they have the reputation of great proficiency in magic and necromancy.

In Andhra the Kevutos are often called Nayyala. *Nayyala* means fried rice. This is prepared by the women of the caste during the harvest season and sold to the reapers who have no time to prepare a meal. The sellers are paid in grain. But the Nayyalas still do some fishing, usually with a drag net placed in shallow water. They hold the cobra in special veneration.

Among the fresh water fishermen of Andhra the Bagatas, Balitas or Bhaktas, are said to be experts in catching fish with a spear. On Dasehra they worship their fishing baskets and also a kind of trident, that is a fishing spear with three points. The Bagatas live in the Vizagapatam District. They have exogamous clans the names of which are largely identical with those of the cultivating castes like Kapus, Telahas and Ventaris. They are probably fishing sub-castes of these communities. They have a tradition that in the past they served the rulers of Golkonda and Madugula as soldiers who made them grants of land for their service.

The Bagatas are by religion either Vaishnavas or Saivites; the former cremate their dead, while the Saivites bury them in a sitting position. Telugu and Oriya Brahmins officiate in their marriages.

Near Vizagapatam there is a sacred pond in which fish are kept. The fishes in the pond are sacred and may not be killed. They are well fed and tame. They feed from the hand and allow themselves to be stroked. On Shivaratri a feast is celebrated at a small shrine near the pond. The priest is a Bagata and the ritual consists in the feeding of the sacred fish.

The Chambadis are a similar fishing caste in Andhra Pradesh. Like the Nayyalas they prefer the drag net, while other castes like the Besthas use a cast net. At weddings, the Chambadis perform rites which are found in low castes like the Malas and Mangalas. For funeral rites they employ a Dasari priest of their own caste.

The untouchable serving caste of the Panans has a section that specialises in fishing. It bears the name Minpidi, which means 'fish-catcher'.

But the most important sweet-water fishing caste in south-western Andhra, Kanara and northern Tamilnad is that of the Besthas. They also call themselves Kabbera, while in Coimbatore and Salem districts they go under the names Reyyala, Siviya or Parivarattar. The Besthas

of Coimbatore and Salem speak Canarese.

The Besthas are divided into various endogamous sub-divisions which have partly strayed from fishing and are now engaged in agriculture and field labour, in cooking and other domestic services, in boating and transportation of goods. In pre-railway times they were the palanquin carriers for the government officers.

The caste status of the Besthas is low. This may be due to their occupations. Of late, the profession of fishing has come into disrepute because it involves the killing of living beings. But the Besthas are still a little higher than the nomadic hunting tribes such as the Bedas and Kurachas; even the barbers and washermen are lower in rank. The latter accept food from the Besthas.

Besthas may act as priests in the temples of Yellamma and Maramma, the goddesses of cholera and smallpox.

The Besthas prefer fishing with the cast net. The first fish caught with a new net is killed and its blood smeared on the net, a fire is lit, incense burned and then a mesh of the new net is thrown on the fire. If a snake gets entangled in the first catch, the net is rejected; it is burned or otherwise disposed of.

All these castes are sweet-water fishers, and though they may live near the sea they will never venture out into the sea for fishing. Sea fishing is carried out by another set of castes. They have no social contact with the inland fishers.

One such caste is called Mila. Its very name, Milavandlu, means 'fisherman'. The Milas also call themselves Odavandulu because they do their fishing on the sea in boats. The caste is divided into numerous exogamous clans among which that of Dhoni (boat) and of Tota (garden) are important.

Another sea-fishing caste in Andhra is called Palle. It is probably identical with the great labouring caste of the Pallis further south. The Palle are divided into two sections, the Mina or fishermen, and the Vana, or settled field labourers. The Vanas consider themselves superior in rank and refuse to dine and marry with the Minas. But now they have adopted the title Reddi and claim descent from the Agnicula Rajputs, a claim which is of course not recognised by the higher castes.

The Nulias live on the east coast of Orissa from Lonatak to Vizagapatam and further south. They are said to have been brought to Puri from Ganjam by the British to work as porters on the docks. But Puri having lost its importance as a port, the Nulias were forced

to earn their living as ocean fishers. The word Nulia is derived from Nahariya—'people working on the waves'. Their main sub-section is called Wada-baliji, 'ship's crew'. Another sub-section calls itself Jalari—'workers at the net.' These various sub-sections do not interdine nor intermarry, though the Wada-balijis intermarry with the Kalasis, earlier immigrants to the coast but obviously of the same caste.

Like other low castes, the Nulias permit divorce and widow marriage, and practise levirate. The position of the Nulia women is good, and even a minor girl must give her consent before she can be married off. The Nulias have a caste council which exercises a strong authority. Its head is called 'king' whose office is hereditary. He has supreme power and no appeal is possible against his decision. Under him are the village chiefs who are elected.

The Nulias worship the local Hindu gods, but they have also shrines of their own and worship with preference female deities to whom they sacrifice fowls and pigs in a rather cruel manner. Ganga Devi is their main deity. They have their own priests, but for weddings they engage Brahmins.

The Nulias are not only fishermen, but some work as railway coolies and at other jobs. The women do daily labour as well. They are hardworking, but their wages are low and they are much exploited by their employers.

The Pattanavadas, Pattapus, Salangukarans and Samadis are really different sub-sections of the Tamil fishing caste called Pattanavanas. They must have migrated to Andhra from Tamilnad at some time in the past.

The Paguththans are another sea-fishing caste. They are identical with the Sambadavans.

The ocean fishers of Ganjam and Vizagapatam are called Vada or Jalari. They seem to be a sub-section of the Palles with whom they still interdine and intermarry. The men of the caste do the fishing, while their womenfolk do the selling of the fish, going in villages and towns from house to house and offering their fish for sale. The language of the Vadas is a corrupt and vulgar Telugu which suggests that they are not indigenous.

Their caste council has a strict control over all the members of the caste, a better control than in most other castes in Andhra. The headman of the council has to be consulted in all caste affairs and must be invited to all feasts.

The Vadas appear to be very religious, as almost every family has

a special shrine with the images of their gods. The figures are either of clay or wood. The clay figures moulded by potters and painted by carpenters represent deities of the sea and are invoked before every fishing expedition for protection against any mishap, or deities of disease which are invoked in sickness or in times of misfortune. They also venerate the spirits of their dead relatives whose counterfeits are carved and painted by carpenters very realistically.

(b) *In Kanara*

In Kanara we find the same distinction between inland fishermen and ocean fishers. The two sections do not mix.

Some of the river fishers have already been described, such as the Besthas who are very numerous in Kanara.

A similar, but independent inland fishing caste calls itself Kabbera. The Kabberas have two endogamous sub-sections, one of which is fishing and the other cultivating land. The two sections do not intermarry, but they still eat together. The cultivating section considers itself higher than the fishing section. The fishermen of this caste are experts in the use of their large round boats (coracles), made of wicker work and covered with ox leather. They are eight or nine feet in diameter and controlled with paddles.

Some Kabbera families have already adopted other occupations which might give rise to new sub-sections. The Barikas, for instance, are now village watchmen and look after the wants of visiting officials. The Jalakaras wash out gold dust in rivers, and the Mudderu are dyers.

The Kabberas generally allow widow marriage, but prohibit divorce. They employ priests of their own caste. In the past they dedicated their daughters to a local goddess and permitted them to live as prostitutes.

Another caste of river fishers is that of the Killekyatas. They are supposed to be immigrants from Maharashtra. Besides fishing, they give exhibitions of puppet plays. Their dolls are of rather phantastic appearance, hence the name 'Killekyata' which means 'mischievous imp'. They usually display scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The Parivar are another mixed fishing caste, some sections of which are engaged in cultivation or trade. But they are really a Tamil caste.

The Malavas or Mala Bhoves are another such caste. One section is fishing, the other engaged in cultivation. Their favourite deity is Hanuman.

Ocean fishing is well developed on the coast of Mysore State. In north Kanara the sea fishers are Kolis; they are the southernmost section of that large fisher caste working all along the west coast of India from Gujarat down to Kanara. Further south the sea-fishing caste is called Moger. The Mogers speak either Konkani, Canarese or Tulu; some are patrilineal, the other matrilineal. The Mogers are mainly fishermen, but work also as boatmen, porters and even as cultivators and daily labourers. In the past they were palanquin carriers for the wealthy. Now they also find employment as oil-pressers, musicians, traders and even clerks. A few are employed in the Government fisheries. They have the ambition to rise in social status by claiming a former higher caste status and by observing strictly the Hindu food taboos. Since ancient times they have been much exploited by the owners of their boats and nets, and also by government officials. This exploitation is still going on.

The Mogers have a low social status, and Tulu barbers refuse to serve them. In the Konkanim area their status is better; they are shaved by Konkanim barbers. In religion they are Hindus, but they venerate and propitiate in preference the evil spirits (*bhutas*). Brahmins do not officiate in their religious ceremonies; they have priests of their own caste.

The Mogers have a caste council in every settlement, its headman is quite influential. His office is inherited in the female line.

Divorce is easy among the Mogers.

Another caste of fishermen on the sea-coast from Karwar to Honavar is that of the Harakantras, probably an offshoot of the Bhois. A legend relates that the ancestors of the three fishing castes Ambig, Harakantra and Bhoi were brothers who quarrelled and separated. They are distinguished from one another by the way how they throw their fishing net and how their womenfolk carry fish to the market for sale.

They have a well organised village and caste organisation and their elders keep strict control over the community. They have a totemistic clan system.

Their traditional occupation is the catching and selling of fish. In the past they also carried palanquins and litters. They own small boats and use fifteen different kinds of nets. They also work as carpenters, office peons and messengers.

Their social status is low; only the impure castes accept food from their hands. Of all the fishing castes of Kānara they are the lowest.

(c) *In Kerala*

In the hills of Kerala river fishing is carried out mainly by the aboriginal tribes living there. In the big rivers of the coastal areas and in the backwaters the professional fishers are called Valan. The word *valan* is derived from *vala* which means 'fish', in a tank. Others derive the word from *valayan* which denotes a person casting a net for fishing.

According to their own tradition they were brought to Kerala by the legendary Parasurama to ferry goods and passengers across the rivers and backwaters on their boats. Another tradition states that the Valans were originally Arayans, but became a different caste when the Perumala kings appointed some of them for boat service and conferred on them special privileges. They hold themselves higher in rank and do not interdine and intermarry with any of the other fishing castes.

The caste is not divided into any sub-sections, but they have four exogamous clans which correlate to four clans of the Brahmins. Tradition claims that once they were attached to four Namboodri Brahmin clans for service, but for some misconduct they were dismissed and degraded to their present low state of fishermen. They are forced to live in hamlets of their own, and no high-caste man will build his house in their vicinity.

Like most low castes, the Valans allow widow marriage and divorce. Polygyny is permitted, but not polyandry.

Each caste group has its own headman (Aravan) who watches over the observance of the rules, punishes offenders and accepts gifts on festive occasions, especially at weddings. In the time of the Rajas the power of the Aravan was much higher; he could take decisions even in civil and criminal disputes between members of the community. As a rule, his office was hereditary, but cases are known when a member of another family was chosen as headman.

The Valans are Hindus, but do not belong to any particular sect. They worship Shiva, Vishnu and the heroes of the various Puranas with equal devotion. Like other fishermen, they venerate especially the goddess Bhagavathi who is propitiated with offerings of rice flower, toddy, green coconuts, plantains, and a fowl on Tuesdays and Fridays. Their most important festivals are the feasts of Mandalamvilakku Shivaratri, Vishu, Onam and Dasehra, feasts which are celebrated by all Hindus in Kerala.

The Valans have no temples of their own, but worship in the

temples of the higher castes. They are not allowed to enter the temples nor even the temple enclosure. They have to stand at a long distance from the outer walls of the temple.

Fishing is the chief occupation of the Valans. They confine themselves to the rivers and backwaters which send off many branches and sub-divisions that are shallow in many places, especially in the northern parts, but those between Cranganore and Cochin are at all times navigable. The fish that inhabit the enormous expanse of the backwaters and that live in the numerous rivers, ponds and other inland waters of Kerala, are an important economic asset for the whole population. Fish give a steady employment to the fishing castes, supply the people with food, oil and other extracts from fish.

The Valans generally live on the sandy tracts of land along the backwaters where they build their huts of bamboo or mud. Few of them possess houses built of wood or stone. During the summer months they live mainly in the open air, for even on hot days their courtyards are shady and breezy.

The Valans are expert rowers and possess the special privilege of monopolising the boat traffic between Tripunathura and Cochin. But they belong to the untouchable castes equal to the social status of Ezhavas. A member of the Valan caste, K.P. Karuppan, was a Sanskrit scholar and a reputed poet. Through a poem he evoked once the sympathy of the Cochin ruler who abolished the banishment of the Valans from the market of Ernakulam. Later Karuppan rose to a high official position and was able to assist the Harijans of Kerala in various ways.

While the Valans fish in the rivers and backwaters, the Katalarayans (sea Arayans) or Katakatti do their fishing in the ocean. In social rank they are even lower than the Valans; in fact they are untouchables and in the past were not permitted to frequent the public roads. Even now they rarely venture into the interior.

Their nets are generally made of cotton threads and when large, are often the joint property of several families. Meshes of three sizes are used, according to the type of fish to be caught. Their methods of fishing are quite primitive. When, for instance, a shoal of mackerel is sighted, they attach a big stone to one end of their net while with the other end they row quickly around the whole shoal of fish.

Another caste of fishermen on the Malabar coast are the Mukkuvans who in the past were the palanquin bearers for persons of high rank. They are bold sea-farers and in olden times carried the name

and fame of Kerala into distant lands. They at one time had the foreign trade of the country in their hands. They were skilled boat makers.

Now they also serve as boatmen. In some places they cultivate coconut plantations. In South Malabar they have been converted to Islam, but follow their traditional calling. Their conversion took place comparatively late. Because of their late conversion and their low occupation of fishing they are allotted a low status in Moplah society. They call themselves Pusalar. Though the higher classes of Moplahs do not practise untouchability, they keep aloof of the Pusalars and do not intermarry with them, though the next higher class (Malbaris) may occasionally accept Pusalar brides.

The boats of the Mukkuvans are of mango wood and fitted with mast and sail. In modern time some of the Mukkuvans have acquired motor-boats. The nets are generally made of coconut fibres, cotton thread being used only for nets with the finest mesh. Salt is not usually carried in the boats and the fish decompose so rapidly in the tropical sun that the boats cannot go far out on the ocean. Only occasionally they venture ten, fifteen or even twenty miles away from the shore.

The Mukkuvans, being skilled fishermen, fish all kinds of fish, large and small. The return of the boats is always a great event in a fishing village. Willing hands help to drag them up to the beach, and an eager crowd gathers round each boat discussing the catch and haggling over the price. The pile of the catch is soon disposed off and a string of carriers, each with a basket on head, starts off at a quick trot. Relays of runners convey fresh fish from the coast to distant places in the interior. All that is left unsold is taken from the boats to the fish-yards to be cured by the Salt Department.

Those who catch fish are sometimes also the curers, but usually the two jobs are done by different sections of the caste. The fishermen of Kerala have a brisk trade with cities like Coimbatore, Salem and other places. Sardines are the fish most in demand.

There are two more small castes of fishermen in Kerala, the Nulayans in Travancore District and the Valluvans in Malabar.

(d) *In Tamilnad*

There is one main inland fishing caste in Tamilnad, the Sembadavan. But especially in the border districts there are other fishing castes which are indigenous to Andhra, Mysore and even in Mahārāshtra.

They have migrated to Tamilnad. The Sembadavans are however indigenous to Tamilnad, as it seems. They generally fish in ponds, lakes and rivers. But in times of floods they may carry passengers and goods across the big rivers in their round leather-covered basket coracles. Since fishing often does not give them sufficient to live on they are often forced to earn their living as ferrymen, field labourers, weavers and sellers of salted sea fish. Most of them are very poor. Still, they consider themselves superior in social rank to the ocean fishers. They will not interdine and intermarry with them, and throw away a pot that has been touched by an ocean fisher. They are served by Brahmins at weddings and on other festive occasions.

The Sembadavans are Saivites by religion; in few places only they worship Vishnu as their main god. Those who are ferrymen worship Ganga and offer to her rice and goats.

Tamilnad, having a long coast-line, can support more sea-fishing castes than river fishers. Sea fishing is much more important and productive. Yet, the river fishers enjoy a higher social status, probably because they acted in the past also as palanquin bearers for high-class people. That gave them some prestige.

From the Kistna to Tanjore District the sea-fishers belong to the Karayan caste, which means 'people on the sea-shore'. In the Census they like to be called Tachcha, i.e., carpenters.

Further south are the Pattanvans. The meaning of the word is 'town-dweller'. They are also called Karayan, 'sea-shore people'. They are divided into two sections, the 'big' ones and the 'small' ones. Some Pattanvans give themselves high-sounding titles though they are quite low in social rank.

The Pattanvans are ocean fishers and catch fish with nets in their catamarans, which are rafts, consisting of three logs of wood tied together at each end. In Madras City the Pattanvans have the privilege of providing the bearers of the palanquin on which the god's image is carried when a procession is held.

By religion they are Saivites, but worship also various other deities. They are very religious and before each fishing expedition they worship the god Kuttியandavan, the ocean and their nets. On their safe return they again make an offering to the gods.

The Pattanvans have a strict village organisation. Their village council is headed by one or more headmen whose office as well as those of their assistants is hereditary. The headman is quite powerful and he must be consulted in all public and private affairs. All business

of the village community is discussed in the council and offences against the caste rules punished. But an appeal is possible to a higher authority set over a number of headmen of village communities.

Another caste of fishermen is found chiefly in the sea-port towns of Tinnevely District, but also on the north-west coast of Sri Lanka (Ceylon). The Paravar are divided into three sections, one speaking Tamil, the other Malayalam and the third Canarese.

The Tamil Paravar have their headquarters in Tuticorin; their headman is called Talavan. Most of the Paravar have been converted to the Christian Faith. They claim Kshatriya rank and will not eat in any but Brahmin houses. They have since centuries specialised in pearl fishing. But according to one author, the Paravar are divided into thirteen classes. The classes will be enumerated here, from the highest to the lowest, mainly to show what activities the Paravar carry out, besides fishing: (1) sailors, (2) dealers in cloth, (3) divers for corals, (4) headmen, (5) divers for pearl oysters, (6) divers for shells (*chank*), (7) packers of cloth, (8) and (9) tortoise fishers, (10) shark fishers and fishers in general, (11) palanquin bearers, (12) peons for the headmen, (13) crab fishers.

In the past centuries they were the boatmen of South India who carried the Hindu colonisers eastwards to Kambodia, Indonesia and as far as the Philippines.

The Malayalam Paravar engage in various occupations, in catching fish, planting palm trees, and washing cloths for the Christians, Muslims and low castes. They also make wicker baskets, rattan chairs and sofas. Their womenfolk are occupied in lime and shell burning.

Off the south-west coast of India there lie twenty-two islands, the Laccadives. Only ten of them are inhabited. The islanders are obviously descendants of immigrants from the mainland, the coast of Kerala. Originally Hindus, they were probably in the 14th century converted to Islam. In 1961 their number was 2,620. They are divided into three endogamous sections of unequal social rank which is still rather strictly maintained. In the past the highest section had the monopoly of owning the sailing vessels, political superiority, which was jealously guarded, and certain religious privileges. Inheritance is still in the female line.

The islanders build their own boats of which they have five different kinds. The launching of a boat is a big social and religious affair. All the inhabitants of the island take part and drag the new boat under the recital of the Koran on rollers into the sea.

Fishing is done by hook, seine and harpoon, and by net. The islanders have three kinds of nets differing in size. Fishing is carried out singly, but often communally in groups of ten or twelve men. In the latter case the catch is divided among the participants according to old traditional rules.

There is a brisk traffic with the mainland. The fish caught, but also other products of the islands, copra, coir products, vinegar, etc., are sold on the mainland.

In the past traders and their agents made huge profits by buying the products of the islanders and selling to them products of the mainland, such as rice, and other cereals, spices, clothes and other commodities. This exchange of goods which made the middlemen rich has since about fifteen years been taken over by order of the Government by a cooperative society. But the islanders complain that the society is inefficient; in the past they at least got what they wanted though they had to pay a heavy price. Now they are often badly served by the officials.

Women play an important role in the economic and social life of the Islands. They contribute their share by working coir into fibres for making nets and ropes. Rope-making is an important industry on the Laccadives.

On Amindivi, the natives are all Muslims. In spite of this they are divided into three endogamous sections of which the Koyas form the aristocracy holding all positions of power and prestige. The second section is called Malmi and its members serve as captains in the sailing vessels owned by the Koyas. The Malmis own land and are economically independent of the Koyas, though originally they were their tenants.

The third section, Melacheri, is the lowest. In past times they were the praedial slaves of the Koyas. They are still economically the servants of the Koyas all round the year. They serve as menials in the houses of their masters, work as crew on the boats owned by the Koyas, and carry out any odd jobs, such as toddy tapping, coconut plucking, doing a barber's job, work as sawyers, black- and goldsmiths, carry loads, thatch and repair houses, paint and repair boats, etc. They are paid in kind, and are given the usufruct of thirty to fifty coconut trees.

Melacheris have also social obligations. A Melacheri holds the umbrella for the bridegroom during the wedding procession, carries the landlord's son on his shoulder to the mosque for circumcision,

and has to ask the landlord's permission for any important function to be performed in his house.

Melacheris have many social disabilities, for instance, they are not allowed to wear shirts, shoes or gold ornaments. They may not use umbrellas. They cannot attend folk-dances, and have music and fire-work at their weddings. They cannot be functionaries at the mosque nor take an active part in devotional singing or in religious service. They should not sit in the presence of a Koya and must remove their headgear when they meet one. Though interdining is permitted, no Koya will take food from the plate of a Melacheri. Their economic and social conditions are deplorable and they are much exploited by the Koyas.

Conclusion

To sum up it can safely be stated that the situation of the fishing communities in India is extremely complex. A healthy attitude to fishing is generally taken by the aboriginal tribes: they consider fishing an important subsidiary source of food supply. But they do not completely rely on it. Moreover, they pursue fishing more as a pastime and sport.

The professional fishing castes in the interior of India are almost everywhere in economic distress. With the destruction of large parts of the forests, the increase of population, including the number of fishermen, the increasing industrial contamination of rivers and ponds, fishing begins largely to fail to be the exclusive source of livelihood for the many traditional fishing castes. They are more and more forced to look out for other occupations for which they are often mentally and physically unfitted. Thus they simply add their numbers to the already immense host of unskilled labourers with often long periods of unemployment.

River, lake and pond fishing, on the other hand, would have immense scope for expansion and development. It could produce valuable food, and give employment to many fishermen. A systematic and well-planned fishing industry on modern lines would have to be introduced. A beginning has already been made, here and there, but a consistent and nation-wide policy would be required.

Sea fishing is a problem by itself. This is a branch of economy of much greater importance. The sea-fishing industry employs already a much larger number of workers. It has immense potentialities. But

it badly needs modernisation, better organisation and supervision. It could be much expanded and made more productive. To mention a few possible means of improvements only: the boats could be motorised and enlarged, the fishing methods could be improved, new marketing facilities could be created, cold storage facilities must be created and the exploitation of the fishermen must be stopped.

For an impartial study of the situation of the fishermen has proved that in many places the fishermen are not well organised and are without protection against the exploitation by the big fish traders and boat owners. They have often no security of employment, they have no provident fund and get no gratuity, often no medical attention, nor can they claim any compensation in case of accident or sickness. Often no first-aid boxes, and not even life-jackets and life-buoys are provided for the boat. Many fishermen are overworked: working hours are long and strenuous; no leave is granted. Wages are on the average lower than for work on the coast.

The respective authorities of the Indian Government are well aware of the situation, but often powerless to improve it. Still, efforts have been made to give loans and subsidies to deserving fishermen, to provide training in modern fishing methods, to create better marketing chances and to provide cold storage facilities. Of course, all these efforts are still woefully inadequate.

Outside assistance has also been sought. In 1952 the Parliament of Norway responded to the call for help and decided to come to the assistance of the fishermen in India. Two villages in Kerala were selected to receive intensive assistance in capital and expertise from Norwegian fishing experts. A marked improvement of the fishermen in the two villages could be noted. But so far they have failed to persuade other fishermen to adopt similar methods of fishing and to profit from the success of the fishermen in the two villages helped by the Norwegian aid programme. The strong inborn conservatism of the fishermen, and a hidden opposition by agencies fearing for their vested interests have been largely responsible for this lack of cooperation. Yet it is all important that the fishermen develop in themselves an active desire to improve their economic condition by their own efforts and that they do not wait passively and lethargically for assistance by the Government.

It has also been seen that the social position of the fishermen all over India is low. It is better in the interior, and in certain parts of the coastlands, but it is certainly worst in Tamilnad and Kerala.

Here the Government can do very little, but certainly with an improvement of their economic conditions the fishermen will be able to rid themselves of their social degradation and to gain a respected place in the life of the nation.

4. Basket and Mat-makers

In general, the tribal people of India are experts in the manufacture of all kinds of basketry and mat-making. And their products show often much artistic sense. But they may not produce these articles for sale. In fact, some tribes would expel those caste fellows from their community who made a living from the manufacture and sale of bamboo and reed articles, since this is degrading in the eyes of the Hindus and the profession of low castes. The reason is that the manufacture of baskets and mats is associated with other disreputable and degrading practices of these untouchable castes.

Basketry, mat-making and similar activities are indeed connected with certain objectionable habits of the low castes occupied in this kind of business. Generally basket and mat-makers lead a nomadic and unsteady life. It might be that the collection of the material or the sale of such products necessitate a nomadic life, or it might on the other hand be that a strong inclination for an unsteady life can be associated with this type of occupation.

Most of these castes admit recruits from higher castes, especially such individuals who are unruly and disinclined to follow the dull routine of a farmer's life. Others join the caste because they have formed illicit connections with women of the caste some of whom appear to be specially attractive even to those far above them in rank. The offspring of such high-caste unions might result in a new sub-division of the caste. For these castes are much sub-divided and the general tie between the various sections is rather loose.

These castes have a bad reputation among the puritan high caste villagers also because their womenfolk are not seldom used to earn some additional money by prostitution. Some villagers are bold enough to defy the strict rules of Hindu sexual morality and to risk excommunication from their caste.

But there are other reasons for their social degradation: they are not at all fastidious in the choice of their food; they not only eat meat, but the flesh of all kinds of impure animals and even vermin. And many of them eat beef which is an abhorrent habit in the eyes of

the Hindus.

It is also alleged that they have a strong inclination to theft and burglary. Basically they are foodgatherers who accept all that kind nature offers them, but the ordinary Hindu villagers consider it theft if these people collect vegetables and grass in their fields and grazing grounds, or in the jungle near the village.

In India a more or less definite line is drawn between castes which work in bamboo and those who work in reeds, palm leaves and roots. The bamboo workers seem to belong to the big Dom caste; they go under the name of Bansphoras (bamboo splitters, 15,604 in 1961), Basors (126,105), Bansors, Bansos or Bansodias. Bamboo has become for these castes almost a deity which is worshipped accordingly at the annual caste meetings. These castes devote themselves exclusively to working in bamboo. But in all other aspects of social and moral life the two groups are alike.

In the Himalayan hills, especially in the upper ranges, the basket makers and bamboo workers belong to the Barera caste. Though not scavengers, they are treated as outcastes like most bamboo and reed workers.

The Kanjars (47,242 in 1961) of Upper India (Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, are such a caste. Their main occupation is the making of mats from *sirki* reeds, baskets of wattled cane, fans of palm leaves and toy rattles of plaited straw. From the stalks of the *munj* grass and from the roots of the *palas* tree (*Butea frondosa*) they make ropes which they sell or barter in the villages for grain and milk. They also make leaf platters for diners. Occasionally they work as stone-cutters and makers of grinding mills. They also manufacture the brushes which weavers require for the cleaning of cotton yarn.

The Kanjars are not at all fastidious about what they eat and consume snakes, lizards and field rats, and other vermin. They are much addicted to liquor.

They are said to reserve a certain number of their daughters for marriage in their own community while prostituting the rest. Their women are often handsome and like to sing lewd songs for the entertainment of the villagers. They enjoy this type of songs. The Kanjar males are often skilled acrobats. But they have the reputation of being clever thieves and even burglars and house-breakers.

As a rule they haunt the Jumna valley and the East Punjab, but gangs are found also in central India and occasionally they venture

even into South India where their reputation is even worse than in north India. In West Bengal (Purulia District) where they are also found they hunt jackals, catch snakes and twist strings and ropes of hemp and cotton.

A very low caste of Uttar Pradesh is that of the Basors or Bhaksors (22,093). They rank lower than the Chamars. They make baskets, winnowing fans, and other articles from bamboo, reeds and grass. Their products find a ready market in the villages. They act also as musicians and their bands are in great demand during the festive season. They usually shirk the drudgery of field work and prefer to stick to their traditional occupation of basketry.

Basor women are called to help in delivery cases. They cut the umbilical cord, wash the soiled clothes of the woman who gave birth to a child, massage her limbs and give her a bath for four or five days after birth. Then only the barber's wife takes over.

In the eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh and in Bihar the Moghias do the work of the Basors. Their name is probably derived from the old kingdom of Magadha. The Moghias are a nomadic people, wandering about in groups which often, during the absence of the adult males in jail, are under the leadership of a woman. They pretend to follow the usual occupation of the vagrant tribes—the weaving of mats, basket-making and the like. But these are often a cover for less lawful practices, and the Moghias are shunned by the village population as thieves and cheats.

In Rajasthan they specialise in the manufacture of fans (*pankha*)—Their social position is comparatively good. They are allowed entrance into temples, the barber shaves them and the Brahmin officiates in their religious feasts. They abstain from beef and buffalo meat. They do not accept cooked food and water from untouchable castes.

A small caste of similar type, the Bantar, Bant or Bator (44,555) is found in Bihar and Bengal, mainly in Purulia District. The Bantars make baskets and thatch houses for the villagers. A few of them work as field-hands. The Bantars keep pigs and eat pork. Socially they rank low, lower even than the Dusadhs. In religion they are completely Hinduised.

The Korangas of West Bengal (11,332 in 1961) or Karangas, Kor-gas make baskets, dig tanks, and also make cart wheels and other wooden agricultural implements. They are experts in castrating bulls and goats. Their social status is very low.

In Central India the Bargundas follow a similar occupation. In 1961 they numbered 4,943. Their main occupation is the weaving of mats, the making of brooms, etc., of date-palm leaves and baskets of palm sticks (*kajur*). The local population (of former Ratlam State) treats them as untouchables. From the dialect they speak among themselves they must have come from Tamilnad. But their Tamil is not pure, it is mixed with Canarese and Telugu. They are not able to state how, when and from which particular place they came to Ratlam State. Old persons state that it was twelve generations ago that they were brought to their present place of residence.

The Bargundas eat flesh of every kind except beef. They are experts in catching lizards which they eat. They worship the local deities, especially those popular among the low castes. They are much afraid of the evil spirits.

The Kaikadis, already mentioned as a vagrant tribe, perhaps identical with the Bargundas, are also basket-makers. But they use as material for their products no bamboo, only the stalks of the cotton plant, the leaves of the date-palm and reeds.

A peculiar case is that of the Lorha caste in Central India. They are cultivators, but are of low social status because they grow hemp (*san*). For some unknown reason the Hindus have a strong aversion to growing hemp and treat all those who grow the plant and make strings and sackcloth of hemp as impure. Several sub-sections of the Kurmis seem to have suffered ostracism for growing hemp, such as the Kumrawat, Patbina, Danhur, Santoria, Pathari and Atharia Kurmis. The reason usually advanced for this social ostracism is that the process of separating the hemp fibres is messy and produces a bad smell. But it is more probable that hemp growing and the manufacture of hemp string and sacking are degrading because these jobs are carried out usually by vagrant and criminal castes, such as the Banjaras and Bhamtas who formerly used gunny bags for the transport of grain and other goods. They formed the transport section of the Indian armies.

In Orissa, the basket-makers call themselves Bavuri or Bauri. They are found mainly in Ganjam District. They are also known as Khodalo. They are a polluting caste and must live outside the village in separate hamlets. Socially they are higher than the Kondras, Dandasis and Haddis, but lower than the Samantiyas. They claim that palanquin carrying was their former traditional occupation and therefore call themselves also Boyi.

The Bavuris have a famous saint, Balliga Doss, who is said to have

worked miracles. His descendants are the priests of the caste. The Bavuris do not worship the higher Hindu gods, such as Jagannath, but venerate their ancestors and Thakurani the village goddess.

Another caste of basket-makers, speaking Oriya, but now settled in Andhra, is that of the Godagulas. They work in split bamboo and make sundry articles not usually manufactured by the ordinary bamboo workers. They are regarded as a polluting caste, addicted to meat and liquor. They allow widow marriage and divorce.

More respectable are the Gudalas living further south in the Vizagapatam and Ganjam districts. Their name is obviously derived from *guda*, a basket for baling water. Originally forming one caste with the Godagulas, they are now a separate caste and are not defiling the caste Hindus. Brahmins officiate at their weddings. They permit widow marriage. Their main occupation is now basket-making, while in past time they claim to have collected medicinal herbs for native physicians. Some still do so. Others have become fresh-water fishers.

The basket and mat makers of Maharashtra are called Burud. They are engaged in the manufacture of bamboo baskets, winnowing fans, birds' cages, sieves and mats. They are very low in social rank, but above the Mahars and Mangs. They are permitted to draw water from the public wells, and barbers and washermen serve them. They rank equally with the Bedars and Agasas (washermen). But Brahmins refuse to officiate in their religious rites, nor are they allowed to enter the inner portion of a Hindu temple.

Like other low castes they permit widow marriage and divorce freely. They eat meat, but no beef or carrion, and often drink toddy and other alcoholic beverages in excess. Besides the local Hindu deities, they also worship the images of their dead ancestors.

There has been little change in the technique of their production during the last hundred years. They use the same tools, and produce the same articles. They live in the same flimsy huts as before, nor do they own any land. They are still as illiterate and backward as ever. They are unable to save any money nor do they have any inclination to do so. If a Burud wants to expand his shop he would have to borrow capital from a money-lender who charges him an exorbitant rate of interest.

A caste of mat-makers in Kanara is that of the Raj Parivars. Their mats are made of *kora* or *chunni* grass and woven on an improvised loom consisting of three bamboos, three or four column bars through which the threads are passed. The threads are spun of vege-

table fibre (*bhutale*). The colours are usually green or red. The men do the weaving, while the women spend a few hours daily in tying the ends of grass after the weaving has been done.

During the monsoon the Raj Parivars do farm service for a change.

In South India the Medra caste is wide-spread over Tamilnad, Andhra and Kanara. The Medras are bamboo workers, making mats and baskets, sieves, winnowing fans and other kinds of wicker-work, and selling their products on the weekly markets in villages and towns. A hatchet and a knife are their only tools. In contrast to other such castes, the Medras are steady settlers and do not wander from village to village. All members of a family cooperate in the work. Baskets are much in demand for packing fruits (mangoes) and flowers to be sent to the larger towns for sale.

5. *Vagrant Artisans and Traders*

Numerous semi-nomadic groups are roaming from place to place in India, because they would not be able to make a living if they stayed in one place. They are either artisans or traders who produce or sell articles which are needed in small quantities or on certain occasions only. Such artisans and traders are, for instance, the producers and repairers of grinding stones, of knives and other kitchen utensils, of bangles and trinkets. For their unstable habits and other disreputable behaviour they are generally looked down upon, kept at a distance and easily suspected of theft.

In recent time these semi-nomadic artisans and traders are often reduced to penury as their traditional articles can now often be produced industrially and are thrown on the market in mass and at a cheaper rate. Often these industrially produced articles have lost in artistic value, but on the other hand they might be of better make and are generally much cheaper. Artisans and traders who are too slow to switch over to more remunerative jobs, but cling to their traditional mode of life are often reduced to the verge of starvation.

Owing to the many sub-divisions in these castes and the uncertainty of their origin it is very difficult to classify them. As it is a general practice in India to form special castes for each specific occupation, manufacture or sale of one particular article, ever new castes and endogamous sub-castes are formed. Thus knife-grinders, manufacturers and sellers of querns and mill stones, lac and glass bangles, firework, mat and bamboo work, etc. form each particular

castes which marry and dine often only among themselves, keep to themselves in social life and live apart from the well-established and steady village and towns people.

One such caste is that of the Lakheras or Laheris, a small cast whose members make and sell bangles and other articles of lac. Nowadays lac ornaments have largely been replaced by glass bangles, but certain tribes, such as the Banjaras and the Bhils, for instance, still wear a number of lac bangles on arms and legs. And the women of many Hindu castes wear lac ornaments at least at weddings. Thus the Lakheras still have a ready if restricted sale for their wares. They are found mainly in the central parts of India.

They claim Kayasth origin, but this claim need not be given full credence. The very fact that the Lakheras allow divorce and widow marriage, eat meat and drink liquor, reveals a low social status. Also their connection with lac reduces them to a low status, for the production of lac necessitates the killing of the insects which produce the lac. This is considered a sin by the Hindus. Yet, the Lakheras are not outcastes, and even Rajputs and Banias, though not Brahmins, take water from them. In Maharashtra they rank higher than the Kunbis.

The Lakheras also produce the red thread (*kardora*) which most Hindus wear around the waist. Also the so-called *Rakhi*-band and the necklets of red silk or cotton thread are manufactured by this caste. These threads are generally of red colour. The Lakheras also make toys of lac.

A similar caste, often identified with the Lakheras, is that of the Patwas or Patras, also residing in Central India. They specialise in the production of silk and cotton threads and bands; but they also sell lac ornaments and glass bangles.

The Patwas make all kinds of silk and cotton strings for pyjamas, coats, and shirts, etc., but also the *Rakhi* bands, the *phundri* strings with which the country women tie their hair in a bunch at the back of the head, the *janjira*, a thread worn as an amule around the neck, the *ganda*, which is tied under invocations around the wrist in protection against black magic and witchcraft. Some Patwas make necklaces of gold or silver thread, but they also string cowrie shells on strong threads to tie around the necks of bullocks and ponies.

Unlike the Lakheras, the Patwas are not allowed to rear the *tasa* silkworm or boil the cocoons on pain of expulsion from the caste. Some Patwas still travel from village to village to hawk their wares, while those in the larger towns can afford to have permanent shops and

are thus more sedentary.

The caste of glass bangle makers seems to be of a more recent date, since the manufacture of glass bangles was apparently unknown in India before the Muslim invasions. There is a small caste of glass bangle makers in northern India, called Manihar. Glass bangles and bracelets are an indispensable adjunct to domestic life for Hindu women, for glass bangles are not so much worn as ornaments but as badges of the married state. The Manihars are nominally Muslims, but they have retained many Hindu customs at weddings and other feasts. They eat meat, but no beef, nor pork, and they abstain from liquor. The Manihars admit into their community converted Hindus belonging even to the lowest castes.

In Central India the caste of the glass bangle makers calls itself Kachera. They seem to be of Turk origin. In modern times also Hindus sell glass bangles, though they do not manufacture them.

The clan names of the Kachera caste suggest that it is of mixed origin. The Kacheras have exogamous clans. In olden times the Kachera men stayed at home and manufactured the glass bangles in their own furnaces. Nowadays they buy them readymade from the glass factories. The sellers are Kachera women, for they have to fit them on the wrists and arms of the Hindu women who would allow no men to touch them. All Hindu women of good caste wear glass bangles and other glass ornaments. Thus the Kacheras perform an important service in Hindu society. In spite of this service the Kacheras do not enjoy a high caste status. Nowadays they are also very poor, as glass bangles are very cheap and many break while being fitted on.

Another occupational caste of this type are the makers of firework. They call themselves Kadera, Kandra, Golandaz, Bandar or Hawaldar. In the past they were employed by the Indian armies making gun powder, missiles of iron, etc. They also served as cannoneers in the armies. After the cessation of all the wars in India, they lost their employment and were restricted to the manufacture of firework. Fireworks form a very popular spectacle in India, especially during Diwali and on other festive occasions when crackers are fired off.¹

Probably due to their mixed origin and their connection with army

¹How popular such fireworks are especially at Diwali time, can be inferred from the fact that in 1977 no less than 750 million rupees were spent on fireworks during Diwali time.

life, the social status of this caste is low. But the Kacheras are not untouchables though Brahmins will not accept water from them.

A peculiar type of wandering artisans are blacksmiths which have no connection with the professional blacksmiths of the Indian villages. One such caste, the Ghisaris, is spread over the whole of northern and Central India, from the Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, over Central India down to the Deccan and to Kanara and the Karnatak. These nomadic tinkers and iron-smiths wander in small groups or single families from place to place within a certain area which they rarely overstep. Their language is a corrupt Gujarati, which suggests that originally they came from there. They wander during the fair weather, living in temporary tents. They simply stick two forked poles in the ground, lay a third pole in the forks of the two vertical poles and stretch a sheet or blanket over it to form a tent with sloping sides and open ends. They travel about with their families and implements in carts.

They make horse-shoes, iron spoons, sickles, reaping hooks and other field implements, including cart axles and wheel tyres, and repair all kinds of iron field tools. Being more expert than the ordinary village blacksmith, their services are in demand for the making of tools for the carpenters, weavers and other craftsmen.

They have Rajput clan names, but the law of exogamy is not strict. Though girls occasionally marry late immorality is not tolerated. Ghisaris are served by Brahmins and are accepted as Hindus of good standing.

There are various nomadic blacksmith castes. One of these is the Gadoliya Lohar caste. The Gadolias are a traditionally nomadic group of western Rajasthan, primarily occupied as blacksmiths, with cattle trading as a subsidiary occupation. They move in carts, therefore the name Gadoliya. With the progressive development of the iron industry they find less and less employment and their income is dwindling.

They live in small kindred groups. Three persons are required for the management of a smithy. One to work the bellows, the second to do the hammering and the third, the most skilled one, to give proper shape to the article in hand. The management of a smithy is the job of a household. The bellows is served by old women or children. The hammering of the hot iron is done by men or women, while the proper shaping of the article is the job of a skilled worker, usually the head of the family. The methods of production may not have changed for many generations; they have been handed on from father to son, without any improvement or any desire for it. The working

unit is the nuclear family rarely, including additional kin, i.e., the wives and children of married sons, or widowed parents.

The Saiqalgars or Shikligars (7,424) whom Crooke mentions in connection with the Ghisaris, are a Muslim caste which travels throughout the open season grinding knives and scissors, and at other times plying in the cities. A sub-division undertakes the care of razors. In old times the Shikligars were the armourers and polishers of weapons, but they are now in sadly reduced circumstances.

They are short, wiry men with dark skin, high cheek bones and thick lips. They are a migratory people moving with their wives and children, carrying their belongings and tools in carts.

The Khumras are another small Muslim caste of upper India whose function it is to quarry and sell querns or mill-stones for domestic use. They are hewn at the quarry and hawked about on pack-animals. The roughening of the face of the stone after it has been used for a long time is the work of another caste in Central India and the Deccan, the Takaris or Takankars, a sub-division of the Pardhis. While the Khumras are honest people, the Takaris are said to utilise the time they spend squatting on the premises where they are employed, in finding out the exact position of certain property of the household that could easily be removed by a nightly visit.

Another nomadic caste, serving a special need of the public, scattered all over Northern and Central India, is that of the cotton cleaners, called Bahna, Pinjara or Dhunia. Most of them are Muslims by religion. In South India they are known as Dudekula, Latif or Nurbash. In former times they were quite numerous, but the modern ginning factories have ruined their trade of cleaning hand-ginned cotton. However, they now go round and card the cotton of mat-tresses and pillows which have become hard after much use. The carding of cotton is achieved by subjecting it to the vibration of a bow-string. The bow is somewhat in the shape of a harp. The string is made of the sinew of some animal. This renders the implement objectionable to Hindus.

Thus the cotton cleaners are mostly Mohammedans though they still observe many Hindu customs and ceremonies. They are divided into endogamous territorial sub-divisions which still bear Hindu names. Especially their wedding rites are mixed and are a compromise between old Hindu and new Muslim rites. They pay a bride price, and no dowry.

Respectable Muslims look down on the Pinjaras because they are

not free of Hindu customs. The Pinjaras retaliate by refusing to take food and water from any Mohammedan who is not a Pinjara. But Hindus too treat them as low caste people. Though the Pinjara is generally allowed the use of the village well, neither water nor the pipe is accepted from him by the Hindus.

The cotton cleaners of South India, especially of Tamilnad, are called Dudekulas, also Panjaris or Pan Panjukottis. The word Dudekula derives from *dude* cotton and *ekula*, to clean. Though now Muslims, they also have retained many Hindu customs. They tie the *tali* (South Indian Hindu marriage badge) around the neck of the bride. They also celebrate a feast when a girl has her first menstruation, which is not done by Muslims. They also take part in Hindu worship. They are very dedicated to the veneration of Muslim saints whose graves they visit. Circumcision is, however, invariably performed. And the Khazi is an important personality in the life of the Dudekulas: he slaughters the animals whose flesh they eat, he circumcises the male children, marries them and decides their disputes. But on the whole, the Dudekulas are rather ignorant of the higher thoughts of Islam.

In dress and appearance the Dudekulas are not different from the local Hindu population. The males shave off their beards, but when they cut their hair, they do not leave a scalplock as the Hindus do.

In Belgaum, Bijapur, Kanara, Ratnagiri and in the southern Deccan in general the Gollas are an itinerant caste of medicine sellers. They claim kinship with the Golla cowherd caste, but they are now a distinct caste, with no interdining and intermarriage. They must have come from Telengana, as they still speak Telugu among themselves. They have six endogamous divisions which neither inter-dine nor intermarry. They seem to be of mixed descent, and are united only through their common profession.

They sell drugs and country medicines which they collect in field and jungle, but also do some simple operations. They remove guinea-worms with a pin, bleed patients with a copper cup and brand liver and spleen diseases with a red-hot iron. They are not ashamed to beg if there is no demand for their services.

Another community of a similar type is that of the Vaidu, numbering about 25,000 in Maharashtra. The word *vaidu* derives from *vaidya* and means a village physician, quack or charlatan. The Vaidus claim as their original home country Andhra Pradesh from where they have spread to Maharashtra around 1700 A.D. They still speak

Telugu among themselves, but are fluent in Marathi and Hindi as well.

A hundred years ago the Vaidus were almost fully nomadic in their habits, hawking drugs and medicines which they prepared from roots and herbs. Since the increase of Government and private hospitals and dispensaries even in the rural areas, the Vaidus have lost much of their clientele and are now forced to accept other jobs as well. They are at present also engaged in field work, in the mending of tin boxes, the manufacture of buckets, in trade in donkeys, pigs, hair and in sharpening knives. The womenfolk sell trinkets, cheap ornaments and other articles. Besides, the Vaidus also trap and hunt all kinds of small animals and birds.

In Maharashtra the Vaidus are split into four strictly endogamous sub-sections with partly different customs. After Diwali in winter and in the rainy season they live in their base villages, at other times they move from village to village selling their drugs and medicines.

They are not untouchables, though they certainly live apart from the ordinary village folk. They worship the local Hindu gods, but only during the four months of their residence in a village. During their wanderings they do not seem to observe any religious rituals.

The Jhingabhois, sellers of medicine like the Vaidus, claim to be a separate caste. They are found mainly in Akola District of Maharashtra. They have no fixed home and divide themselves into small parties; each party having a specific area assigned for the sale of country medicines. They have no temples of their own, but are permitted to worship in Hindu temples. Their main deity is a goddess, Katmaramma or Sarkaramma, but also Mariamma (smallpox goddess). They practise ancestor worship and believe that they can keep the spirits of their deceased in a silver image which they have being made soon after the funeral. If the image is not made, the ghost will in their opinion get no rest and might cause trouble. One family in the band keeps a similar image of Katmaramma and the goddess is invoked in any case of trouble.

The medicine men of Andhra are called Mandula. They are itinerant hawkers of country medicines, going from village to village and offering their stock of medicines in market places and on the main streets of towns and villages. Often these medicines are supposed to have magic potency.

The Mandulas are not disinclined to thefts and other manners of deception if the opportunity occurs. Once a year all members of the

caste assemble at Masulipatam on Shivaratri, where they perform a big sacrifice of pigs and goats in honour of their deities, especially a female deity. After that they celebrate a feast in which much liquor is consumed.

The traditional retailers of scent, incense, toothpowder and a pink powder, called *kunku*, call themselves Ateri in Central India, Gandhi in Gujarat and Bukekari in Maharashtra. They peddle their wares for which there is still much demand from village to village, and house to house. Most of them are now Mohammedans, but originally they belonged to low Hindu castes, such as Teli, Gurao or Beldar. They still observe certain Hindu customs, especially during weddings. They build a wedding booth, anoint the couple with turmeric, and tie a so-called *kankan* (wristband) on the wrists of bride and groom. They practise child-marriage. Some of them even worship Hindu deities, especially the goddess of smallpox.

Itinerant peddlers are also the Bharbhunjas or grain-parchers. Originally they seem to have belonged to the Kahar caste, but their social position is fairly good. Even Brahmins accept parched grain from them since it did not come into contact with water. Parched grain, gram or rice, is very popular in India, to assuage a momentary hunger. The Bharbhunjas now also sell tobacco, sweetmeat and occasionally fireworks.

In Chhattisgarh this caste is called Dhuri, and it is also recruited mainly from the Kahars. There their social status is not so good as their connection with the Kahars or Kandus (in Bengal), the traditional palanquin carriers, is still well remembered among the Hindus. The Dhuris also accept domestic service. They practise child marriage, and allow widow marriage and divorce.

From Bengal migrated a small community of jute weavers to Maharashtra, numbering about 5,000. They are Kewats or Kaibarttas, and obviously belonged originally to the big fisher caste of Bengal of the same name. They manufacture and sell jute products, like carpets, mats, bags, etc. Their life is sedentary during winter when they cultivate, harvest and process jute on rented land within a hundred miles of their residence. They stay for a couple of months on the field. After harvesting the jute, they grow water melons on plots along some rivers. When the fruits are ripe, they sell them on the local markets or through brokers in Poona or Bombay.

During the monsoon when moving around is difficult they stay at their base villages and are engaged in weaving. When the monsoon is

over, the head of the family goes to sell the products manufactured during the rains throughout Maharashtra frequenting the weekly markets and places where fairs are held.

These jute growers and sellers of jute goods stay thus at three different places in the course of a year: at the base village during the monsoon, on hired land during cultivation in winter, and on a river bank in summer for the cultivation of water-melons. Only the head of the family is wandering about, selling more or less throughout the year the jute products which he and his family manufactured.

These Kewats of Maharashtra certainly live apart from the ordinary village population. Though not untouchables, they are treated as a low caste and are regarded with suspicion by the village folk.

In Maharashtra and in Andhra, these semi-nomadic hawkers and traders hold annual caste gatherings. In Maharashtra the places where they meet are Madhi, Jajuri, Malegaon, Raja Deulgoan. On this occasion each caste venerates its own main deity, and there is a caste meeting when caste affairs are discussed, offenders punished and new laws promulgated or old ones confirmed. The opportunity is also used to buy new supplies for their work or trade. Even donkeys or ponies—the usual carriers of their property or goods—are traded at these fairs. Some of the castes, the Vaidus for instance, also trade in buffaloes.

CHAPTER 4

Artists and Magicians

There are professional castes which could also be called 'Subsidiary Professional Castes' because they are employed only on particular occasions in the life of the upper and middle classes of Hindu society. Their services are required at certain feasts and for particular celebrations when the ordinary village artists and entertainers are thought inadequate or not sufficiently sophisticated. It may also be a question of prestige to call special performers to prove that the celebrating family can afford the expense. Ordinarily, a village community is self-sufficient and can supply everything that people might require. But on certain occasions, such as a marriage or a special sacrifice, might warrant a special celebration or once in a while a wealthy man might wish to show off by inviting such artists to perform. No doubt, the professional entertainers and artists are waiting for a chance to contribute their part to the festivity.

1. Bards and Genealogists

One such group is that of the bards or genealogists. No doubt, their functions are very ancient. All nomadic shepherd races in Inner Asia and Africa employ them to keep trace of their family descent, to record the connections of the family with others through marriage, to recall to mind and praise the heroic deeds of the ancestors in battle and raid, and to entertain them with the recital of ballads, stories and poems. And many gifted singers and poets were generously rewarded by their audience either for the beauty and art of their words or the quality of flattering praise.

Nomadic shepherd tribes, after entering India, have kept up this tradition. Thus the Mahabharata mentions a band of bards and panegyrists who marched in front of Yudishthira and sang his praise.

as he returned from the battlefield of Kurukshetra. Ever since they have stayed at the courts of kings and wealthy landowners. The Rajputs in particular have the institution of bards and genealogists. But even less wealthy and socially inferior castes may have genealogists, usually members of their own caste, who know their family connections and who inform them whom they can marry and whom not, who register the birth of a child, attend all weddings and again register the date of a death.

Genealogists are obviously of importance in a society which lays so much importance on the rules of intermarriage, hypergamy and kinship or clan exogamy. Thus an exact knowledge of the permitted or forbidden degrees of kinship and affinity was indispensable. It had to be left to experts with a knowledge inherited through generations to trace all the ramifications of the pedigree of a certain family and to state authoritatively whether the marriage with a certain person was permitted or not.

While thus the task of the genealogist became important for all castes, that of the bard had always remained more or less a luxury. The kings and rich barons, no doubt, could afford to retain at their courts or homesteads such bards as the official recorders of their family history; but less fortunate members of the profession had to wander from place to place, on the lookout for people, places and opportunities where their recitals would be welcome for entertainment or as an enhancement of social prestige. Such opportunities offered themselves at weddings, on certain festivals and at pilgrimages and fairs.

The caste of genealogists or Bhats is divided into many sub-divisions, according to the caste they serve. Highest in rank are the Brahmin or Birm Bhats who claim Brahmin descent. Also the Charan and Jaga Bhats claim the same rank. Second in rank are the Raj Bhats who claim Rajput descent and status. Both wear the sacred thread. The Jasondhis and Brid Bhats who serve the lower castes do not put on the sacred thread of the twice-born. The genealogists of the lowest classes and of the untouchable castes are generally treated as members of these respective castes, since they accept food from them. They are even inferior to the caste which they serve.

In the Punjab, for instance, the Bhats of the castes lower than the Jats (whose Bhats are the Sansis) are the Mirasis and the Dums. Both castes are of very low social status. But among them they sink lower in status, according to the rank of the caste which they serve. At the

same time the Mirasis are also minstrels and musicians, while the Dums are bamboo workers.

In Central India the Pardhans, who are the bards of the Gonds, rank below ordinary Gonds, who give them food, but do not accept it from them. The same relations exist between Jats and Sansis. The Kurmis will not even take water from the hands of their bards. Even among the untouchable Balahis (weavers and village servants in Central India) their Bhats must marry among themselves because no ordinary Balahi will give his daughter to a Balahi Bhat.

The community which a Bhat section serves is divided into circuits, each being assigned respectively to a certain member of the Bhat community, who annually visits each family in order to learn what domestic events have taken place since his previous visit. At present everyone of those incidents, in particular births, marriages and deaths, is entered by him in his register. The Bhat also chronicles all the other events worthy of remark which have occurred to affect the fortunes of his patron. On the death of a Bhat, his patrons are divided among his sons if he has any. Such is the reputation of the genealogist for accuracy and knowledge that his register is accepted as final in any question of affinity or relationship, and even before such written documentation (*vahi* or *wai*) were customary, no client ever thought of disputing the decision of the genealogist on these matters.

With the decline of the old traditions, however, and the increase of the number of Bhats, many of them have been obliged to give up their traditional occupation and to take to trade or cultivation. Some earn their living as go-betweens and heralds at wedding feasts; and in the eastern districts the Bhats may even stoop to the manufacture of leaf umbrellas. Some Bhats in Rajasthan have acquired herds of cattle and carry salt, grain and piece-goods to localities remote from the railways.

There is a similar caste of bards and genealogists of a lower type in the region between Cutch and Rajasthan, the Charans. The name seems to connect the caste with grazing and in fact it is by cattle breeding and transport by pack-bullocks that the Charans mainly now earn their living. Some have taken to cultivation.

The Charan caste is sub-divided into territorial sections with numerous exogamous groups. The families following the traditional occupation as genealogists consider themselves superior and intermarry with each other only. They are generally more refined in appearance and behaviour than the farming and cattle breeding

sections of the caste. But in present time they are in a minority.

Most of the western or Cutch Charans, at least, live by transport on pack-bullocks. Their trade has suffered by the extension of railways across the desert tracks, but many of them have adapted their operations to the new situation and ply along the main feeder roads to the chief stations. The Charans engaged in the transport business bear a strong resemblance to the Banjaras in appearance, dress and customs. It is not impossible that there is a racial connection between the two castes.

Tradition has it that in old times the Charans, as the Bhats, were the bards and genealogists of the Rajputs. It is related that the Rajputs were so fond of the flattering praise songs of the Bhats and Charans that they sometimes rewarded them royally with the grant of much land or with lavish presents of money and jewelry. On the other hand, bitter satire and ridicule were poured on those who behaved in a miserly manner. Many a Rajput ruined himself financially by giving away in an exaggerated love of prestige presents which he could ill afford. Thus it is said of Chand, the famous Rajput bard, who sang of the wedding of Prithvi Raj, king of Delhi and hero and ideal of the Rajputs, in such a manner that the bride's father emptied his coffers in gifts, but filled them with the praise of mankind. Chand received once a lakh (1,00,000) rupees in gifts.

In the capacity of bards and genealogists the persons of the caste were sacred, and in consequence they could travel from place to place without any fear of molestation from enemies and robbers. Thus it became the custom to entrust them with messages and goods which they always delivered safely to the addressees. The guarantee of their safety from unscrupulous robbers lay in the custom of *chandi* or *traga* and *dharna*.

These consisted in their readiness to commit suicide or mutilation on themselves. It was common belief that their ghosts would then haunt the persons whose ill deed had forced them to take their own lives. Many instances of such killings and suicides were related, and the subsequent terrible punishments of those against whom they were directed. People in those lawless days in a country infested with many dacoits set the highest trust in the Charans; their security was eagerly coveted in every kind of transaction. No traveller could journey unattended by these guards, and when rents and property were concerned the Rajputs preferred a Charan's bond to that of the wealthiest banker.

Analogous to the custom of *traga* was that of *dharna*. The usual method was to sit starving oneself in front of the door of the person from whom redress was sought until he gave in from fear of causing the death of the suppliant and being haunted by his ghost. This is in fact the prototype of the hunger-strike so often resorted to by Gandhi and many others after him in modern India. Other more barbaric forms of *dharna* were placing a heavy load on one's person or threatening to burn oneself, or one's own mother, or a cow or calf, if satisfaction was not forthcoming.

The force of such threats lay of course in the certainty that they would be carried out unless redress was given. In the case of the Charans nobody had any doubt that they would carry them out. Too many instances were known of their readiness to inflict such terrible punishment on themselves. The Charans, moreover, have the reputation of being violent and turbulent, and their ghosts were particularly feared as most vindictive and malevolent. The curse of a Charan was regarded as most effective, and members of the caste used to accompany the army to battle and curse the enemy.

In Himachal Pradesh there is not much opportunity for artistic entertainment in a modern form in the rural areas. Cinemas are too far away, and renowned dancers do not go to these distant areas. Thus the traditional folk drama which obviously originated in former princely states is still very popular. A group of seven or eight men, some of whom are dressed up as girls in women's clothes are the ensemble. Women do not take part in these performances. The folk drama is called Kariāla, and its performers are called Kariālchis. They belong to various castes, but usually are of low status. They are of different age. The language in which the text is spoken is the local dialect, usually a mixture of Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and Pahari.

The performers are professionals who visit various places to give their performances. The actors often like to speak in rhyme. The drama, liberally interspersed with dances and songs, is full of witty puns which are received with loud laughter by the audience. A good many of the jokes are indecent, but this makes them all the more popular. The drama is accompanied by an orchestra, consisting of some drums, a harmonium, a flute or clarinette, and cymbals.

Such folk dramas usually last throughout the night. The actors are fed by the villagers, and in addition get a cash present, according to the excellence of their performance. These dramatic performances are held commonly around Divali after the harvest, when the villagers

have money on hand and a respite from their agricultural work. The drama invariably starts with a prayer and homage to God.

A caste of low social status, but engaged in a similar profession is that of the Dums or Mirasis in the Punjab. The members of this community are both minstrels and genealogists. Their Hindu name of Dum connects them with the Doms, who are also musicians of some kind. But the Dums, as they exist in present time, do not resemble the Doms in appearance and seem to belong more to the race of Jats or Rajputs. They are superior to the Doms in attainments as in status and are not untouchables, though they are below the rank of farmers and artisans. They are almost all Muslims, and the name 'Mirasi' may be the Arabic for 'inheritance' and thus refer to their work as genealogists.

They officiate chiefly in the families of the lower farming population and for the impure castes. Some Jat families employ them, though the accredited genealogists for that caste are the Sansis, as mentioned before. The families ambitious of a rise in society, however, engage the Jaga Bhats. The musical attainments of the Mirasis are considerable. Some only sing, others play the flute, pipe, lute, cymbals and different sorts of drums. Their women also sing and dance occasionally, but only for the entertainment of patrons of their own sex.

Those who are genealogists in permanent employ of a definite circle of clients hold their office by heredity and do not associate or intermarry with those similarly engaged among the impure castes. The profession was in the past quite lucrative, especially where agricultural prosperity suggested the necessity of an improved family tree. Even in the open market, the Mirasis were and in some places still are popular and well-paid entertainers at fairs and large weddings.

The Mirasis have, on the other hand, also the reputation of being shameless blackmailers and notorious extortionists. If their fee is not high enough, they often give vent to their disappointment by a witty and invariably outspoken burlesque of the genealogy of the ill-advised recusant.

In eastern Bengal, the Bhats, who there resemble the Mirasis, are said to vary their stock ridicule to the manners and customs of the British with depreciatory references to the ancestry of any local magnate whose purse-strings may have been drawn too tightly on the bard's last visits.

The astrologers of north-eastern India, around Gauhati, are called

Ganak. They claim to be descended from Brahmins. Their social degradation is due to their profession, and above all, to their custom of asking gifts from the lower castes. Also, they function as priests for the carpenters who are a degraded caste in Assam. The Ganaks prepare the horoscope for the newborn babies.

In the Brahmaputra valley they wear the sacred thread, pose as Brahmins, recite the Gayatri, and undergo the ten purifying ceremonies. But their claim is not everywhere accepted.

In the heart of Central India, in Narsingpur District, are found the Jasodhis or Karohlas, bards and minstrels, who in former times used to sing hymns (*jas*) in praise of the local Gond chiefs and Maratha princes. They were regarded as a branch of the Bhat caste. Some of them were not averse to petty crime. Some Jasodhis who also call themselves Karohlis, wander about as religious mendicants, singing the praises of Kali. They carry an image of the goddess suspended on a chain around the neck and ask of gifts of sesamum (*til*) and other oil which they pour over their head and the image. Their clothes and bodices are therefore always saturated with oil. They are said to have in the past sacrificed children to the goddess. These children were given them in fulfilment of a vow by barren women.¹

In Maharashtra most castes have their own *bhats* who are the genealogists and registrars of births, marriages and deaths. The untouchables in any caste have genealogists of their own caste. Thus the Mahar *bhat* has the same functions as the *Bhat* elsewhere, but he serves only his caste fellows. The *bhat* families live in the Mahar settlement (Maharvada) as a group together.

The Mahar *bhat* calls himself the "Brahmin of the Mahars." He is addressed as "Rajaji" (king) by the people. When he comes to the village, he is received with respect. But in present time his importance has declined much. Not so long ago his service was indispensable for the arrangement and performance of a marriage. He knew all the Mahars in the circle of his jurisdiction and was well informed about the economic condition of each family. He knew all the village gossip and could advise or warn against marriage with the boy or girl of a particular family. The *bhat* acted also as the official messenger distributing rice grains and inviting officially the wedding guests. At the wedding he had to chant the blessings (*mangal*) and sing the praise of the boy's, respective girl's families. Even now he is always invited

¹R.V. Russell and Hiralal, I. 1916, 368-9.

by the people for this purpose.

The *Bhat* families worship a special god, Munja, who is the "king of the spirits." But in present time their services are often dispensed with.

The genealogists and bards of Kanara, Andhra and Tamilnad are called Bhatrazu. *Bhat* means 'lord' and *razu* or *raya* means 'ruler.' Originally the bards and genealogists were, however, Brahmins. But through long association with the kings and princes, they became somewhat secularised and degraded and adopted the customs of their patrons. Thus they assumed Kshatriya rank. In course of time, in imitation of the kings, also small chiefs and wealthy land-owners, and later even people of more moderate status and wealth desired the history of their families recorded and occasionally their praises sung. They of course had to be satisfied with bards and genealogists of lower rank and status. Thus the caste of bards and genealogists is a functional caste, and is divided into sections of various rank and origin. Even the impure and untouchable castes want their births, marriages and deaths of their family members recorded. These of course have to be satisfied with genealogists of their own caste, as such of higher caste refuse to serve them.

Thus the Telugu section of the Bhatrazu, for instance, have as their patrons the Reddis and Vokkaligas. But many of them have been forced to give up their traditional occupation. They have either taken to cultivation, or to carpentry or joined government service. Some have become beggars and there is a section which has taken to crime.

Though in Kanara the social status of the Bhatrazus is fairly high, they have abandoned the symbol of high caste and given up the sacred thread, they allow widow marriage and some even eat meat.

The bards of the Okkaligas, the main cultivating caste of Kanara is called Helava. The Helavas are obviously an inferior and financially dependent sub-caste of the Okkaligas. They visit the Okkaliga houses reciting fanciful stories about the particular clans (*kula*) of the Okkaligas and the genealogy of their patrons. They know the whole history of the clans assigned to each of them and can repeat the names of all the ancestors. They are in fact the repositories of the village history.

When they make a tour visiting their patrons, they demand alms. In former time they only begged from Okkaligas, but nowadays they ask alms also from other caste people. Even a wealthy Helava has at least once a year to go and ask for alms from his neighbours. Each Helava beggar carries a bell and a begging pouch. The bell is either

of metal or wood, according to the section to which he belongs. The bell he sounds to announce his arrival and as a demand for alms. Whatever he receives wanders into his bag.

In former time the Helavas had to carry the corpses of dead Okkaligas to the cremation ground, and on the third day they were served a meal in the mourning house.

Though economically dependent on the Okkaligas, the Helavas are not treated as outcastes. They may enter the houses of the Okkaligas, fetch water from the public wells, and barbers and washermen serve them.

They eat meat and drink liquor. They permit widow marriage and divorce, and dedicate some of their daughters to prostitution as "servants of the gods".

In religion they are Saivites, and worship the bull of Shiva. They like to make their begging tours sitting on the back of a bull. In social and religious practices they follow the lead of the Okkaligas.

The Pichiguntas of Andhra are also a caste of bards and genealogists. They beat the drums, relate stories and legends, and they have the reputation of knowing the histories of the families who are their patrons. They make up pedigrees and house names (*gotras*) for the cultivating and lower Shudra castes. They are also herbalists, and physic people for fever, stomach ache and other ailments. They beg when no other means of income are available. Some do fieldwork.

2. *Drummers, Musicians, Actors, Jugglers and Acrobats*

In the past, when the land-owning aristocracy still resided in the country they needed some entertainment. This was provided by specialists who acted as singers and dancers, drummers, actors, jugglers and acrobats, jesters and buffoons. Few of them were real artists; they either recited ballads and performed religious dramas, or they entertained their clients with rather crude and rough comical plays, jokes and buffoonery.

In the whole of north India such people have now fallen into evil days. The country aristocracy has partly disappeared into the cities and towns, and radio, television and cinema, and other forms of entertainments satisfy their changed tastes better than the traditional entertainers can provide. On the other hand, those who have need for the old forms of traditional entertainment can often not afford to pay the wandering actors and minstrels. Many of these are thus forced

to look out for other employment or they will have to starve.

One of these entertainers of the past formed more an occupational group than a caste. They were called Bahurupias, from *bahu*, many, and *rupa*, form, because as actors they had to assume many forms or characters. They were recruited from all classes of the population, and persons of various castes took to this occupation.

In the Punjab, for instance, the Bahurupias were mostly a functional sub-caste of the Mahtam caste. They specialised in the performance of dramas and plays of mainly a religious or mythological content. In the Ganges valley and in Central India, on the other hand, the Bahurupias were regarded as a sub-caste of the Banjaras. In some way they were also connected with the Nats from whom they took brides, but without giving their daughters to them.

In Gujarat the Bahurupias are mainly Mohammedans and are by profession actors and story-tellers. They are skilled in imitating the voices of men and animals. Their boys are trained in dance from early childhood. They also are good as ventriloquists. As actors they have a special skill in dressing one side of their face like a man and the other side like a woman, and moving their head about so sharply that they seem to be two persons.

Even coarser and lower in standard than the performances of the Bahurupias are those of the Bhands or Buffoons. Their name is derived from the Sanskrit word *bhanda*, a jester. In the past they were employed in the courts of Rajas and land-lords where they amused their audience with song and dance, buffoonery and burlesque. Often they ridiculed native and western manners in a rather crude and offensive manner. They were an impudent lot and if they were not remunerated well for their performances, they often revenged themselves by reminding their patrons of scandals that had taken place in their families.

The bulk of the caste are now Mohammedans, but originally they were Hindus, as can be assumed from the names of their exogamous clans. Like the Bahurupias, the Bhands too were originally recruited from many castes. One section claims as their ancestor Sayyid Hasan, a courtier of Tamerlane who successfully consoled the ruler with a humorous poem after the death of his favourite son. As Muslims, the Bhands abstain from pork and liquor.

In Spiti and Lahoul, the highlands of Himachal Pradesh, however, the land-owners (Thakur) still employ musicians and dancers for their entertainment. These professionals are called Hensi and are Mongols by race and origin. They are a socially degraded people.

In the higher ranges of the Himalayas the professional musicians are the blacksmiths and carpenters. They beat the drums and play other instruments at temple fairs and on pilgrimages while on ordinary occasions music is provided by the Kolis.

In the sub-Himalayan hills the musicians are called Bajgi. They are really a sub-division of the Doms, but among them they hold the highest rank. They also undertake the work of barbers and tailors. They are beating the drum for the feasts of the Khasas. As the highest Dom sub caste the Khasas allow Bajgi women to wear gold ornaments. They do not inter-dine or intermarry with the other Dom sections. They do not cultivate land like the artisan sections of the Doms who have been granted land by the Khasas.

The Qalandars are nomadic Muslim showmen and acrobats in northern India. They live in tents and carry their belongings on bullocks from place to place. Sometimes their entertainments include performing bears, fighting monkeys and snake-killing mongoose. They also display quail and partridge which have been trained for fighting. In Maharashtra they are beggars.

Similar castes are the Dafalis and the Nagarchis (403) of the Ganges valley. They are Muslims with a sort of religious flavour about their performances. While they collect alms they may occasionally also be asked to exorcise evil spirits by their music.

The Dholis of Rajasthan (4,934), like the Bajanias (671) of Upper India, are Hindu functional castes, recruited from the village menial and scavenging castes, wandering from village to village.

The Turaihas (2,071) of Uttar Pradesh blow horns; *turhi* being the name of the trumpet in their language.

In general, the ceremonial drummers and musicians of a village or temple all over India usually belong to one of the local low castes, and their wages are paid at harvest time in kind. But the above mentioned castes are more strictly professional on their instruments, and wander about for their living. The regular drummers, however, are indispensable for village life. Any rite or public gathering, even those of the most modest nature, needs an accompaniment of drumming, and the village drummer works for all castes including the Harijans. At the height of the marriage season he is a very busy man. He must, for instance, precede the daily procession of the bride or groom round the village for five or seven days before the wedding. And when there are half a dozen occurring simultaneously, he goes from house to house without pause. Again, the occasions for drumming at

a wedding occur at intervals throughout day and night. Perhaps this is why the drummers work together, alternating in the peak periods of work. Besides being paid for these specific occasions, the drummers also receive annual payments from farmers, and collect flour, grain, salt, etc. from the villagers on the full-moon and new-moon days of the month (*punam* and *amavasya* respectively). These are not regarded as alms, however, but as payment for services to the village as a whole—for the drummer must work at all village assemblies, ritual or secular.

The drumming is done on a large, wood-barrelled drum, some three feet long and two feet in diameter. The goatskin at either end has a different pitch, and different rhythms are played at the same time.

But in addition to these local musicians who are permanently attached to a village and do all the routine drumming and playing whenever required, there are wandering minstrels and performers often far superior in skill and playing several instruments. They are engaged on special occasions and for particular feasts though at times they simply force themselves on a village and it would be impolite to refuse them.

The Bhavaiaos of Gujarat are an acting caste performing comedies and dramas at weddings and other festivals before any village audience subscribing for it. A company is often attached to a certain village, as part of the establishment, and from this village they also visit other places in the neighbourhood. They hold the tradition of having once held a higher position in the north, but are now a purely local institution, and their full strength has never been recorded.

The musicians of Kanara are called Hallir. They were originally settled in Tirupati, North Arcot District. They are also called Vajantris. They are an impure caste and are generally not allowed to play at temples and at the sacred thread or wedding ceremonies of the high-caste Hindus. They are employed by the lower castes. Their instruments are the drum (*dhol*), the double drum (*sammel*), the timbrel (*kansal*), the clarionet (*sanai*), the brass horn (*shruti*), the cornet (*kahalo*) and the horn (*shing*). Their ceremonies are conducted by members of their own caste, as Brahmins are prohibited from officiating for them.

The drummers of the Deccan and northern Andhra are called Holia. They also work in leather, manufacturing slippers and leather thongs, but no shoes. They speak a dialect of Canarese, which is perhaps a clue to their origin. They have social relations of a special

kind with the large Golar shepherd caste in Andhra of which they are probably a degraded branch.

They are now treated as untouchables, and are lower in rank than the Mahars, but above the Madigas and Chamars. They must live in the outskirts of the village. They have a traditional aversion to Brahmins.

There are numerous castes of jugglers, tumblers, snake charmers, and the like, each with a different name, but all connected, at least in northern India, under the general name of Nat or Bazigar. It is difficult to state how far the term Nat is the designation of a caste or a function.

In the Punjab, for instance, Nat is usually held to be a caste, and Bazigar the branch of it which takes to juggling and tumbling. In the Gangetic region, again, the Bazigar is a sub-division of the Nat, while the terms Badi, Sapera, Kabutara, denote different performances. Further to the south, the Kolhatis of the Deccan and the Dombaras of Andhra share the occupation and traditions of the Nats in the north.

The Nats, as a caste, are strongest in Uttar Pradesh (1,843), Bihar (497) and Madhya Pradesh (2,539) and number altogether 5,092 individuals, while the Bazigar are strongest in the Punjab (5,084) and Delhi (386).

Physically the Nats appear somewhat different from the Hindu population of northern India. They are of short stature, but lean and wiry; their complexion is very dark. But their facial features are not those of the tribals; they have long and narrow faces, and a narrow nose. Of course, they have also mixed with the local population through illicit liaisons.

The Nats are, as their name (*nata*-dancer) indicates, the entertainers of the rural population. As tight-rope walkers (*badi*) they seem to have played in the past an important role in an ancient fertility cult: they had either to walk on a rope across a deep gorge or slide down on a long rope with terrific speed risking their life in these feats. They are also snake charmers (Sapera, Garudi, Madari) who exhibit cobras, pythons, scorpions and leguanas. They act as skilled musicians (Bazigar), as sellers of medicinal herbs. Some prostitute their women and live on their earnings. Occasionally they act as magicians practising exorcism and witchcraft. Whenever necessary, they work as daily labourers and, as it is alleged, are not averse to petty crime. They also manufacture horn articles, and hunt the wild pig.

They are divided into many endogamous sub-castes which bear either the names of their original habitat, or indicate the nature of their principal occupation. In some of the Nat sub-castes only the men perform. In a few sub-castes the women do not prostitute themselves to outsiders though their sexual morals are generally much laxer than in other Hindu castes.

Nat women are experts in tattooing. Their clients are the girls and women of the rural areas, and their services are eagerly sought after. The Nats are said to possess a good knowledge of roots and herbs and to be adepts in the preparation of medicines, love-philters, aphrodisiacs, and the means for producing abortion. They also sell charms and amulets. There is a certain and constant demand among the village population for all this. The villagers place much faith in their recipes. The Nat women also attend to the needs and ailments of the village women.

Further south, in Central India and the Deccan, the Kolhatis are a similar caste of dancers and acrobats. The name of the caste is derived from the long bamboo pole (*kolhat*) which they use in their acrobatic feats. They also go under the name Dandewala, *dandu* being another name for the bamboo pole. The name Bansberia reveals probably an old connection with the Beria caste of the north, the name meaning a Beria with a bamboo pole. They are also called Kabutari (pigeon-like) because the women know a dance in which they step like pigeons. They are thus an extension of the Nats, and might ultimately be related to the Beria and the Sansi castes.

They have a number of endogamous sub-divisions with names that either indicate their original home or their present occupation. For some of them are occasionally field labourers, or hunters of the wild boar with dogs and spears; some act as village watchmen; others are acrobats or musicians who exhibit their women as dancing girls, or act as pimps for prostitutes. A few are daring robbers, burglars or common thieves and pickpockets. They also sell combs, shuttles of bone for the loom and other articles.

They are a vagrant caste with no permanent home, suspected by the police, and shunned by the village people. Their social status is low because of the ways and methods by which they earn their living, because of their lawless behaviour and their indiscriminate food habits. Though the Kolhatis abstain from beef, they eat other forbidden animals such as lizards, jackals, rats, wild and tame pigs, mon-goose etc. By religion they are Hindus though they rarely visit temples.

to pray; at fairs and temple feasts they are too busy earning their livelihood and have no leisure to think of earning spiritual merit.

A caste of acrobats, tumblers and pole dancers in Andhra and Kanara is called Dombar. These people are supposed to have come from the north. Some sections of the caste lead now a settled life in towns and villages, and conform rather strictly to the social and religious customs of the Hindu village people. At Tumkur, in Kanara, for instance, some Dombar families have a flourishing industry making wooden combs. Fifty-seven families earn their living by this work which was started about a hundred years ago when four or five Dombar families had settled at Tumkur.

But the nomadic sections of the Dombars wander from place to place as wrestlers, pole climbers and rope-dancers. Their women offer their sexual favours to all who want them. They live in flimsy huts made of mats plaited from palmyra leaves. All their goods they carry with them on donkeys.

Dombar women play an important role in the economy of the community. Therefore polygyny is common in the caste. Low class women of loose character are said to join the community to get away from the dull drudgery of village life.

While the settled section of the Dombars keep their womenfolk in strict submission, the nomadic sections allow them great freedom. Women can divorce their husbands and remarry, and adultery is easily condoned. A certain number of girls are dedicated to prostitution. These women also perform on the pole and rope. They are also ready to live as concubines with men of other castes on a more or less permanent basis.

The Dombar groups, whether settled or unsteady, have a fairly strict and effective social organisation. The headman of each group exercises a strong control over his subjects.

In religion the Dombars are much devoted to the mother goddesses. And they have great faith in omens, magic, sorcery and witchcraft. Periodically they celebrate a big feast in honour of Yellamma at one place when they worship the goddess and also discuss common caste affairs.

In the off-season the Dombars breed sheep and pigs for sale and work as daily labourers, while the women beg for alms or sell combs, or catch birds in which they are very skilled.

The social status of the Dombars is low. Their touch is polluting for the high castes, but they are allowed to enter the outer precincts

of temples and the verandas of Hindu houses. Brahmins do not officiate for them except fixing the auspicious days for marriages and other events. The Dombars are generally avoided by the village people not only because they are ritually impure, but also because they are vindictive and revengeful when they feel slighted. They are also heavy drinkers, noisy, troublesome, and eat all kinds of food, even beef.

The counterparts of the Dombars in Andhra and Tamilnad are called Dommara. In physical appearance, in methods of earning their livelihood and in their customs they are not different from the Dombars. They too are acrobatic entertainers, jugglers, tight-rope walkers and snake-charmers. Some of them make mats and baskets and sell them to the villagers, others breed and sell pigs and donkeys, while those settled in villages cultivate fields or work as occasional labourers. The women make combs from the wood of various trees.

The Dommara have a low social position and rank just above the Paraiyas and Madigas. Widow marriage and divorce are permitted. The marriage tie is rather loose and their women are said to prostitute themselves, even those who are married. They also dedicate girls to the gods as Basavis who then live as prostitutes. The men are heavy drinkers and inclined to delicts against the property of the village people. They are said to be expert cattle lifters. They are not at all fastidious in their food habits and eat pigs, cats and even crows.

They now lead a seminomadic life and wander from place to place, carrying their goods on donkeys. They build temporary shelters of palmyra mats held up by bamboo sticks outside the villages.

The headman of a Dommara group is also their priest. Thus he has jurisdiction over temporal as over spiritual matters. His office is hereditary. Like the Dombars, the Dommara seem to have come from the northern regions of India, at least from northern Maharashtra. Though wandering about in Tamilnad, they do not speak Tamil, but Marathi or Canarese.

Another caste of acrobats in Vizagapatam District are the Viramusheti. They are professional acrobats and mendicants, and are specially attached to the Devanga and Komati castes. They have some legends which explain this relationship. They are nomads without a permanent settlement. Before they enter a village, they dress up as acrobats and capering around with sticks and daggers they enter the village. In front of a Devanga or Komati house they begin to dance and perform

their tricks until they are given some food or cash. They also sing and praise the caste of their benefactors.

While the social status of this type of acrobats and public entertainers is very low, the Jettis of Kanara, professional wrestlers, are the aristocrats among them. They claim Kshatriya rank and they are given much respect by the caste Hindus. They eat only in the houses of highcaste people, some only of Brahmins. The name *jeti* is probably derived from the Sanskrit *jayeshti*, one desirous to win victory. The Jettis believe that they in times past resided in northern India. They were often employed as wrestlers and gymnasts at the courts of the Rajas, and in Kanara they gave exhibitions at the court of the Maharaja of Mysore. The wrestling bouts were by no means without danger to the vanquished, while the winners were often generously rewarded. In the time of Tippu Sultan the Jettis were occasionally employed as executioners. They despatched their victims by a twist of the neck. This was the fate of General Mathews, a prisoner of Tippu Sultan. Now, in Andhra, they shampoo and rub in ointments to cure nerve pains and other disorders. They are also skilled setters of dislocated joints.

3. Temple Servants, Astrologers, Palmists, Exorcists and Mendicants

One would expect that in a religious country like India priests and temple servants are among the most highly respected members of Hindu society. This is indeed so as far as the Brahmin caste is concerned. But the respect for priests and temple servants is by far not universal, because it might militate against another, more effective principle, namely that of food regulations. It is a general caste rule that the host who offers food to his guests must be of the same or even a higher social rank than his guests. A member of the twice-born castes normally does not accept cooked food from a Shudra and certainly not from a Harijan. This goes so far that a high-caste man would feel degraded if he were permanently economically dependent on a member of a lower caste. Thus Brahmins who professionally perform religious rites in the houses of Shudras or untouchable castes might be outcasted by their caste fellows. In Central India, for instance, the Balahi Brahmins no more belong to the Brahmin caste, but to the Balahi caste, an untouchable weaving caste. The Balahi Brahmins do not interdine and intermarry with the ordinary Balahis, but they are economically dependent on Balahis and are thus in the

eyes of their caste fellows degraded. The Gonds of eastern Middle India too treat the Ojhas and Pardhans though they act as their priests, exorcists and astrologers, practically as outcastes since they depend on their generosity.

Another general Hindu principle is that every religious function must be rewarded by a gift of money or in kind. The client for whom the religious function is being performed would not feel that the function could take effect unless he offered at least a token gift to its performer. Every visitor of a temple brings at least a flower picked on the way as a gift, but he would not come with empty hands. Beggars professional or occasional, frequently take advantage of this custom and offer prayers and blessings, and then expect a suitable present. There are individuals but also communities and even whole castes which consider begging a religious function and believe that they carry out a religious vocation by being professional beggars. They feel that they bestow merit on the donors of alms who consequently do not deserve any thanks for their gifts.

Though begging on the one hand, and alms-giving on the other, are both religious acts by which merit is gained, the recipient of alms may be losing social prestige if he accepts alms from a member of a caste considerably lower than his own. For this reason some begging castes restrict their begging either to their own caste or to castes of a similar or higher social rank. Those who accept alms indiscriminately even from low castes and Harijans, will therefore be degraded. Thus many priests and temple servants, astrologers, exorcists and mendicants who accept fees or alms from low castes are regarded by the public as of low caste, if not as untouchables.

At every sacrifice the offerings or the victims are finally distributed among the persons taking part. It happens that the victim of a sacrifice in certain cults or at certain shrines or temples, addressed to a particular deity, is an animal, and perhaps an animal whose flesh a Hindu of a respectable caste is forbidden to eat. The sacrificial victim might be a pig, or a buffalo. Thus the priest performing the sacrifice must be a low-caste man because a high-caste priest would not be permitted to touch, and certainly not kill that particular animal. Nor would the partakers of the sacrifice be permitted to take part in the sacrificial meal following the sacrifice. Only in exceptional cases and in some secret cults high-caste Hindus may take part in such sacrifices and partake of the forbidden food without losing caste or without being defiled. Thus in certain temples and for particular sacrifices the

priest needs be a low-caste man, and if high-caste Hindus take part in such a sacrifice, they do it from a distance and without accepting usually of the sacrificial dinner.

Another type of service is performed by professional prophets, the astrologers and palmists. Generally Hindus have a strong belief in astrology. They are convinced that the position of the stars at birth influences their whole future life. Casting the horoscope or birth-letter correctly and precisely is therefore an important task usually entrusted to an expert, a Brahmin. The latter is also consulted to ascertain an auspicious day and hour for important domestic or public ceremonies, in particular for weddings. In many villages a Brahmin is still maintained as astrologer (*Jyotisi*) and given a regular remuneration at harvest time, like the other village officials and servants. In the former princely states the astrologer was an honoured and influential person, endowed with salary and estate by the prince. In modern time the place of the prince is taken by the minister and it is alleged that some ministers never take an important decision without consulting their astrologer and wait always for an auspicious day and hour for a decisive action.

Normally the astrologer is a Brahmin and casting the horoscope is a Brahmin's prerogative to whatever sub-caste he may belong. But there is a much lower grade in the profession called by the same name, or rather, by its popular abbreviation, Joshi. He is chiefly found in northern and central India, and lives by palmistry, exorcism and omen-reading. He accepts his fee for averting the evil influences of eclipses and of the phases of certain maleficent planets, especially Saturn, and is generally playing up to the superstitious credulity of the uneducated villagers.

The caste has many sub-divisions, and their names suggest that the Joshi is of mixed origin. Some sections may indeed owe their existence to a degraded Brahmin ancestor. In the Kumaon hills, for instance, the social position of the Joshis is rather high. They are able even to intermarry with Kanaujias and other Brahmin sub-sections. Another reason for their high status may be that they have almost monopolised the clerical and administrative jobs in these hills. In the Gangetic plains, however, the Joshis are not graded high in social status.

In the higher Himalayan hills the Nats perform the functions of the Joshis. Though they make little pretence to an ascetic character and mainly live by growing vegetables, they are called upon by the hill

people to perform certain semisacerdotal functions. They consecrate new houses, function in the funeral ceremonies of the Kanets and receive as remuneration the clothes of the deceased. They purify houses when they have been defiled. Though in other regions of northern India the Nats earn their living as acrobats and dancers, here they carry out the functions of the Joshis and Jogis. But they are not really priests, but a caste which ordinarily does not recruit outsiders.

In Ladakh, professional beggars who give themselves a religious air, are the Khambas who are of the Tibetan race, hailing from Kham, far to the east of Lhasa. But it appears that the Khambas just give themselves a religious air because it will help them in soliciting alms, and less out of true devotion. The Khambas are nomadic in their habits and move about with their womenfolk and children who all assist them in begging. They live in small tents which, when on the move, are carried by goats which they always have with them.

The Faqirs, on the other hand, are Muslim mendicants. They belong to two main classes, namely, Beshara, or those beyond the law, and Bashara, those under the law. The Besharas have no wives or families and are nomadic in their ways of living. They drink, and do not pray or fast. The Basharas on the other hand are married and have permanent homes. They follow the normal religious routine. Among the Basharas are the Darveshis, who are a class of wandering bear and tiger showmen. They belong to the Hanafi School and are Sunnis. But they do not pretend to be religious.

Among the Besharas are the Qalandars who wander about begging. They are very insistent beggars and can become troublesome, if they are not given alms. They shave the whole body, and the searing of the eye-brows is a most important initiatory rite for them.

Another caste in northern India, catering to the religious and magic needs of the lower classes is that of the Jogis. The Jogis proper, a regular religious order of the Hindus, enjoy a high reputation. But there exists another section of this name, either Hindu or Muslim, whose reputation is not good. They are an unsteady lot, wandering about the country, beating the drum and begging, telling fortunes, writing charms, practising exorcism and divination. In the Punjab they even claim to be able to avert hailstorms from the crops on the field by plunging a naked sword into the ground or sticking a knife into a mound. Of course, a goat has to be sacrificed and a suitable offering made to them. In Kathiawar the Jogis exorcise evil spirits.

and worship a deity called Korial.

Their Muslim counterparts are the Rawals or Faqirs. Many of them are notorious cheats. They prefer to call themselves Mughals. In addition to their usual pursuits, they recite the Muharram stories of the doings of Mohammed, accounts of his miracles, and hymns in his praise. There exists a great number of various orders of these mendicant beggars, each section claiming to be disciples of a particular Muslim saint. Some of them also act as circumcisers.

In the Ratnagiri and Kolhapur districts of Maharashtra the Joshis call themselves Sarvadas. But they are really a community of wandering beggars, and move all over the district from November to May, usually dressed in a long white coat and a large red and white turban. Before starting on their begging tours, they make a low bow to their hourglass-shaped drum (*budki*), which is their breadwinner. They are astrologers and fortune-tellers. But the villagers nowadays have little faith in their predictions. They give them small quantities of grain, old clothes or money in reward for their predictions or simply in charity.

The Joshis are not at all fastidious in the choice of their food. They eat anything that is given them in alms, also meat. They are outcastes, but are served by Brahmins.

The Mahars have a clan, Rayaranada by name. These people move around as beggars and entertainers of the Mahars. Many of this clan belong to troupes of theatrical performers, with a lot of dancing and singing. Young women, tightly wrapped in nine-yard *saris*, with tinkling brass anklets, dance to the accompaniment of two-sided drums, singing erotic songs. Spicy dialogues between the main actors follow; the subjects discussed are politics and social customs. But contemporary arts as well as cinema pieces, historical subjects and any other subjects are brought on the stage. This *tamasha* is the rustic folk-theatre of Maharashtra. The *tamasha* girls are regarded as women of easy virtue and frequently add to their income by practising prostitution.

Another section of the Mahars is specialised in juggling and magic performances. This clan is called Masanjogi. It has a lower social status and is polluting to a higher degree than the other Mahars. Even ordinary Mahars do not interdine and intermarry with them. They seem to have a special connection with the graveyard (*masan*) in which they should also cook their food. At least they should light the fire with a stick taken from a funeral pyre. They are entitled to appropriate the sheet which covered the corpse at the funeral.

They supplement their income by begging.

People are afraid of the magic power imputed to them. They are supposed to be able to cure the sick simply by invocations and magic, but also to cast spells on certain people. The Masanjogis wear a special dress when they visit the villages. Villagers in search of hidden treasure and childless couples are often duped by these Jogis. They are generally suspected of child abductions and murders of women to perform their gory rites.

Another caste of religious beggars in Maharashtra are the Nandiwalas. Their number is 8,000 in the State. They are divided into two main divisions one of which is sub-divided into four endogamous sub-sections of different social status. All claim to have been originally residents of Andhra, one group migrating to Maharashtra 800 years ago, the other in the 17th century.

In the past the traditional occupation of the Nandiwala was to wander from village to village with a trained sacred bull (*nandi*), the vehicle of the god Shiva, and collect alms from the Hindu villagers who venerated the bull. The bulls were trained to identify people, answer questions, stage mock fights, etc. The simple villagers saw something divine in such bulls and were greatly entertained by their performances. They gladly paid some alms to their keepers. The womenfolk of the caste sold trinkets, hair-pins, and medicines at the local markets and fairs.

The Nandiwalas are a respectable caste, perhaps due to their connection with the sacred bull. But they keep apart from the Hindu villagers and live in close contact with their own caste fellows in their own isolated settlements. They seem to have adopted their clan names from the Dhangars (a shepherd caste), the Marathas (cultivators), and the Phulmalis (flower-growing gardeners). They have a strong caste solidarity. Some of the sub-sections meet every three years at a certain place for a caste meeting. The Nandiwalas worship the local deities.

Now a sub-section of the Nandiwalas, but formerly an independent caste, is that of the Deowalas. They wander from village to village with the palanquin of god Ballaji (Yenkoba). It is since about a hundred years that they have started to intermarry with the Nandiwalas. Their number is about 8,000. They are not untouchables, though their social position is low. They too came originally from Andhra and migrated probably in the 17th century into the northern regions of Maharashtra (Ahmednagar, Aurangabad, Bhir and Nasik districts).

They still speak Telugu among themselves though they know Marathi well.

The Deowalas stage their performances in the villages in the evenings with men dressed in rich robes, with masks over the face, with tongue, cheeks, nose, ears and arms pierced with copper needles. The show is enlivened with music and the beating of drums and the swinging of sticks.

But nowadays the Deowalas have almost completely given up their traditional calling. Like the Nandiwalas, they too trade now in buffaloes. They buy pregnant buffalo cows, feed them well for a few months and then sell them just before giving birth to a calf. At that time the cows fetch a good price.

They supplement their income by hunting with dogs small animals like porcupines, mongoose, lizards, wild pigs, etc. and trap partridges and hare. They also go fishing. Especially during the harvest season they work as daily labourers on the fields. Their womenfolk sell trinkets, hairpins, necklaces, beads, etc. in the villages, weekly markets and annual fairs. But they also do domestic service and nurse the children of wealthy people.

They are semi-nomads. Very few of the caste have settled down and started farming.

Another group of vagrant religious mendicants in Maharashtra is that of the Waghyas, also called Vaghe or Murli. They are devotees of the god Khandoba, an incarnation of Shiva. The name Waghya derives from *vagh*, the tiger, as the devotees wear on their neck a small bag of tiger skin, containing turmeric powder. Murli means the flute; it is the term for the female devotee of Khandoba.

The order originated in the custom followed by childless mothers to dedicate their first-born child to Khandoba if they were subsequently blessed with off-spring. Such a child became a Waghya, if a boy, or a Murli, if a girl. But there was no obligation to leave their home and caste people permanently. Some devotees remain at home, and even get married. But they have to worship Khandoba and to beg in his honour every Sunday from at least five persons until the end of their life.

Those who dedicate themselves completely to the service of Khandoba, lead the life of itinerant devotees, singing the praises of the god and accepting the alms of the people. Once in three years they have to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Khandoba at Jejusi, near Poona.

Waghyas and Murlis can marry each other; usually they move around in a team of four on their begging tours. They do not abstain from meat or liquor. In general they follow the customs of the caste from which they are descended. They are permitted to return to civil life whenever they want.

Waghyas are of course ritually pure; but the itinerant devotees of Khandoba at least lead a life apart from the ordinary life of the people in Maharashtra.

Of greater importance were and still are the Gondhalis of the southern Deccan. Their main areas of wandering are now the districts of Colaba, Satara and Kolhapur, but they travel as far as Khandesh. In the troubled times of the 17th century when the Hindus were much oppressed by the Muslims, the Gondhalis gave the lower castes much religious consolation by spreading the cult of Amba Bhavani, a form of Kali. While Maratha poets like Waman and Ramdas appealed to the literate classes, the Gondhalis translated the same sentiments into the coarse language of the mountain dwellers in the Western Ghats. They sang of the exploits of the heroes of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, of the fights of Amba Bhavani, Malhari and other deities against the demons, and aroused in this manner ideas of freedom and patriotism in the hearts of the simple villagers who did not fail to identify the demons with the Muslim invaders. Scenes of these fights were enacted in dramatic plays which made a deep impression. But the Gondhalis were not reluctant to praise the living notables who rewarded them generously for their adulation.

This tradition is still kept up and the Gondhalis make their living by singing and dancing in honour of Amba Bhavani. They are usually invited to perform on the occasion of the investment with the sacred thread or on weddings of high-caste boys. Occasionally one of the Gondhali performers gets possessed by the goddess and begins to foretell future events.

More towards the west where temples of Bhavani are rare the Gondhalis perform sacrifices to the smallpox goddess. The villagers have this sacrifice performed either just before the marriage, or soon afterwards, or on recovering from the disease. The sacrifice is done at the door of the house. The householder must of course provide the offerings, and pay a fee to the Gondhali who performs the sacrifice.

The social position of the Gondhalis is below that of the Marathas. The latter do not accept cooked food from their hands.

In Maharashtra, Kanara and Andhra a somewhat different sort of

marionette showmen is the wandering caste of the Killekyatas. The name means 'mischievous fellow,' and derives from the custom of the showmen to display two dolls of phantastic appearance, one male, the other female. The dialogue between the two is full of coarse jests and indecent jokes. The performance starts usually after a prayer to Ganapati and Saraswati. But the main performance consists of enactments of scenes taken from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The language and style of the performers is adapted to the mentality of illiterate village people. The dolls are cut out of goat's skin and painted in gaudy colours. They are made movable with cleverly arranged bamboo sticks and strings.

The Killekyatas are mainly residents of Maharashtra, but have spilled over into Andhra and Kanara. According to their tradition their ancestor was a goldsmith, outcasted due to a mesalliance, who taught his descendants the art of displaying marionettes as a source of livelihood. After each performance the Killekyatas go around in the village or town and collect alms. Their performances are considered to increase fertility. But some Killekyatas have abandoned their traditional calling and taken to fishing. They are expert swimmers and are employed especially in monsoon time during floods.

The Killekyatas, though claiming Rajput ancestry, are regarded as a very low caste from which only the impure castes accept water and food. But they are not exactly outcastes, for barbers are ready to serve them. But they live practically outside the village community living in temporary shelters on the outskirts of the villages. Those few who enjoyed a good education and thus secured good jobs, have a better social position and are served even by Brahmins when they celebrate a religious feast.

They profess the Hindu religion, but show a special preference for ancestor worship. Their family ties are loose, and divorce is frequent. Almost in every family there is a public woman (Basavi), who is dedicated to the gods and to prostitution before attaining puberty.

The Killekyatas have a fairly efficient caste council which exercises strict discipline over the scattered groups of the caste.

Like the Nandiwalas of Maharashtra, the Gangeddulus of Andhra and Tamilnad wander about the country exhibiting performing bulls. This exhibition of sacred bulls is very popular in southern India. The presence of the *swami* bull, as he is popularly called, is made known by its keeper playing on a small drum. The bull is led from house to house and made to go through several tricks. Usually a dwarf cow

accompanies the bull, and a play is enacted.

The Gangeddulus often acquire and train deformed male calves. Often they are paid for taking the calf away, because it is believed to bring misfortune to the owner's family. Villagers worship the sacred bulls, as they represent the vehicle of Shiva, and offer them gifts of all kinds, which of course are the perquisite of the Gangeddulu.

A Gangeddu mendicant is, like his bull, picturesquely attired. Usually they travel in pairs, one beating the drum, the other performing. The bulls are usually very tame.

Some of the Gangeddulus have taken to cultivation, and occasionally act as Dasari priests. Their knowledge of priestly functions is scanty, but they just offer fruits to the gods and attend funerals.

Their original language is Telugu, but they also speak the local dialects, since this is essential for their performances.

In Kanara the Jogis earn their livelihood by begging, pig breeding and selling, and by selling medicinal herbs. They are a wandering tribe and always take their pigs along. Some have taken to cultivation while others work as occasional labourers. The herbalists hawk their drugs singing out the names of several diseases for which they pretend to have a cure. Their women sell glass beads and needles, and go for begging. In the past they were breeding buffaloes, but later they degenerated to pig breeding, and they are also called Handi Jogis, *handi* being the pig.

Socially they rank very low and they are filthy in their habits. But they rank higher than washermen, Madigas and Holeyas. The wandering Jogis encamp on the outskirts of villages; they put up temporary huts, and even the sedentary Jogis who live in houses perform their religious ceremonies in such temporary huts. They use donkeys to carry their possessions. In sexual matters the Jogis are quite tolerant. Divorce is frequent and easily obtained; widows are allowed to remarry.

The Jogis in south India, in particular those in Andhra, but also those in Kanara and Tamilnad, are itinerant jugglers and mendicants. They are dexterous snake-charmers and pretend to have a profound knowledge of charms and medicine. In addition to begging and pig rearing they are also employed in cultivation of land, in the destruction of straying dogs, in scavenging, in robbery and dacoity.

The women of the caste are very stubborn beggars, act also as professional tattooers and sell charms and trinkets. They are not averse to prostituting themselves.

The Jogis are filthy in dress and habits, and eat all kinds of food and in the house of any Shudra caste. They eat the flesh of even a crocodile, of field rats and cats.

They usually encamp on the outskirts of the village to which they bring their goods on the back of a donkey. Their temporary huts are built of palmyra leaves. Those Jogis who work as scavengers are not permitted to mix with the rest of the community.

In Tamilnad the Jogis consider themselves superior to the Malas and Madigas, but are inferior to the Oddas (earth-workers).

Another caste of religious beggars and fortune-tellers in Maharashtra and Kanara are the Budubdikids. They pretend to consult birds and reptiles to predict future events. The name of the caste is derived from the hourglass drum which they use in their performances. They go from house to house shouting out coming events to the people rattling their drums. As a rule, they visit the rural parts of the country after the harvest when the villagers are in a position and in the mood to be generous. The Budubdikids have also a Muslim section whose members visit the Mohammedans of the village.

Though they practise widow marriage and divorce, and are not very strict in the observance of premarital and marital sex morality, and dedicate, at least in Andhra, some of their girls as Basavis and prostitutes, eat meat and drink liquor, they labour under no social disabilities. The village barber and the washerman serve them. They can use public wells and enter temples, though not the inner sanctum.

Another small caste of beggars, in Kanara, are the Mondarus, descendants, as tradition claims, of a couple of the Bedar caste. The two got married though they belonged to the same clan. The Mondarus seem to hail from Andhra though they are now residents of Kanara. They live a semi-nomadic life and build themselves flimsy huts on the outskirts of the villages. They pass singing from house to house, and when refused alms make themselves disgusting petitioners and a nuisance so that alms are given quickly to get rid of them.

The Mondarus are treated as impure and even non-Brahmins avoid their touch. But barbers are ready to shave them though they refuse to pare their nails, and washermen refuse to wash the clothes of Mondaru women soiled during menstruation.

Their sexual morality is not high; divorce is granted for the slightest excuse and remarriage is easy.

Some Mondarus have given up their begging career and adopted

field work as their living. They receive a better treatment and are considered of equal rank with the Bedars.

A Telugu caste of priests and mendicants, which has spread also to Kanara, is that of the Satanis. They also go by the name Ayawar¹ or Dasari. They act as priests in Hanuman and Rama temples. In Madras the Satanis and Dasaris form two distinct castes. The Satanis are really a mixed religious order recruited from any caste except the Paraiyas, leather-workers and Muslims. The Dasaris, on the other hand, are descendants of a wealthy Shudra, Dasan by name, who became a religious mendicant and worshipper of Vishnu. However, since the Dasaris admit members of the impure Mala caste into their ranks, they are regarded as inferior to the Satanis who have a better social status, and are treated on an equal footing with the cultivating castes. The Dasaris are the priests of castes like the Boyas, and conduct all ceremonies at birth, menstruation, at weddings and funerals.

Both castes are much sub-divided into endogamous sections which however still occasionally interdine. They do not observe celibacy and allow even widows to remarry. Divorce is permitted. They dedicate girls as Basavis. Both castes worship Vishnu on Fridays. They eat meat and drink liquor. Though they themselves do not wear the sacred thread they are its chief manufacturers. The Satanis collect alms in a brass vessel. The Dasaris wander about singing hymns in praise of Vishnu to the accompaniment on a leather instrument. They are engaged by the Shudra castes to recite their chants at funerals. Some train bulls to perform tricks which they exhibit when begging. The women sell beads.

Both Satanis and Dasaris have a low social status. Not even the cultivating castes accept food from their hands, probably because they are economically dependent on them, and eat the meals prepared by the castes they serve. On the other hand, Satanis and Dasaris do not eat food prepared by low serving castes like barbers, smiths, washermen and potters.

Two begging communities in Tamilnad are the Andis and the Pandarams. While the Pandarams are generally recruited from the Vellala caste, the Andis accept members from any Shudra caste. They are therefore lower in social status. One section has a right to claim any deformed child of the Konga Vellala caste. It is a possibility to get rid

¹Ayar was a term of respect analogous to the Hindi 'Maharaj.'

of unwanted children by handing them over to a begging community.

The Andis use to beg by going from door to door beating a small gong with a stick. Often they sing religious hymns or ballads to the accompaniment of the gong. But not all Andis beg. Some officiate as priests in village temples, especially when on certain feasts a large number of goats, pigs and even buffaloes are sacrificed. Other Andis work as bricklayers or cultivators.

The Andis are generally married. They permit widow marriage and divorce. They have no permanent homes and live anywhere, often in the open. They are not treated as untouchables, but the villagers keep them at a distance, no doubt.

Another caste of beggars in Tamilnad is that of the Mondis. *Mondi* means lame and the tradition goes that their ancestor, a shepherd, lost the use of his legs in an encounter with robbers. The local chief ordained that he and his descendants should be supported by the people. Their begging in fact has no religious character. It often assumed a form of blackmail, as the Mondis appear deliberately in filthy dress, vomit at will on the premises of the houses they visit and throw rubbish into those that give no alms. But usually they are able to extort some alms because all want to get rid of them as soon as possible.

Physically, the men are tall and robust, but black and filthy. The women are used to prostitute themselves. Divorce is common in the caste.

They move in small bands, within a certain area, and are directed by a headman. Their social status is low and Brahmins refuse to officiate for them.

The Mudavandis—the word derives from *mudam*, lame—like the Andis and other mendicant castes of lower type, claim the deformed and otherwise handicapped children of the Vellala caste for themselves. For the Vellala farmers this is a welcome way of getting rid of such helpless children who would be a lifelong burden on a poor farmer's family, while such children can be used profitably by the beggars to rouse the pity of the people approached for alms.

The Kakkalans or Kakkans of central Kerala are a similar beggar caste. They are nomads by habit. They worship the sun and stay away from Hindu temples. If they wish to pray, they do it from a distance in front of a temple.

The women of the caste also tattoo, pierce the earlobes of the village women, practise palmistry and tell fortunes. They are experts

in performing the snake-dance. But their traditional occupation is begging.

Exorcists

In most parts of India there are specialists in exorcism and protective spells, and every village or community may have them, but sometimes they have formed themselves into special castes. In certain parts of India where hailstorms are frequent, as in the lower Himalayas, in Bengal and northern Maharashtra, the farmers had in the past the institution of specialists in the aversion of hail. In Bengal the Shilaris were supposed not only to prevent hailstorms from the fields of their clients, but to direct hail to the fields and gardens of their enemies.

The Garpagaris of the Maratha tracts were professional exorcists of hailstorms and formed a special caste. They received their regular wages at harvest time. But in modern time when belief in the magic arts is no more so strong the Garpagaris have lost their jobs and have drifted into other occupations.

Especially in South India there are a number of castes that specialise in the exorcism of evil spirits, in particular the spirits of disease. One of the main castes in Kanara from which the so-called demon-worshippers and devil-dancers are recruited is that of the Nalkes. They are a caste of mat, basket and umbrella makers.

Every village in Kanara has its demon temple in which the officiating priest is usually of the Billava caste. He performs the offerings for the spirits of the deceased celebrities of the village or region, or for the demons of the jungle or village wasteland, the demons of epidemics and misfortune, the demons who guard the village boundaries, and many more.

One of the many methods of worship, veneration and propitiation of the demons is the so-called devil-dance. It is performed by professionals of mainly three castes, the Paravas, Pompadas and the Nalkes. To make the performance more impressive, the dancers are dressed in an elaborate costume of barbaric beauty. The dancers are supposed to get possessed by the demon who then is consulted by the villagers over matters of dispute. The decision of the demon is generally accepted. It is perhaps by this devious means that the low castes are able to exercise some influence on village life.

In spite of their importance as demon exorcists, the Nalkes are of

very low social status. They are inferior even to the Koragas, Paravas and Pompadas.

Though surrounded by communities with a patrilineal system of inheritance, they are matrilineal.

The Pompadas, similar to the Nalkes, but somewhat superior in rank, consist of two sections. One is engaged in agriculture, the other almost exclusively in exorcism and devil-dancing. The Pompadas do not wear the disguises of the demons which are considered low, but only those of a superior type. This may have had its influence on their social status, because they are not, like the Nalkes and Paravas, a polluting caste. They are socially just a little inferior to the Billavas. In their customs, they have adapted themselves closely to the Billavas.

The astrologers and exorcists of Malabar are called Kaniyan or Kanisan. They are divided into two endogamous sections, the Kaniyar and the Tintas. The latter are umbrella makers and exorcists, while the Kaniyar are simply astrologers. They have a tradition that originally they had been Brahmins, but their ancestor was either degraded or they lost their social status because they lost the gift of correct prophecy. The paraphernalia of a Kaniyan are the palm-umbrella, a stick, holy ashes, and a purse of cowries. Usually they are intelligent and well versed in Sanskrit. Even in modern time they are consulted by all classes of the population, even by educated people and by politicians. Their services are indispensable for such events as a birth, tonsure, investiture with the sacred thread, marriage, a journey, a business enterprise, investment of money, etc. Even Muslims and Christians consult them.

In addition to astrology, the Kaniyans, especially the Tintas, practise sorcery and exorcism. They know various methods of exorcising the evil spirits and curing the sick.

Though influential through their art of prediction and prophecy, the Kaniyans are of low social position. In the past a Kaniyan had to keep 24 ft distance from a Brahmin or Kshatriya, and 12 ft from a Shudra. A Tinta had to keep 36 ft from a Brahmin and 18 ft from a Shudra. Kaniyans were not allowed to approach a Hindu temple. But during weddings these avoidance rules were somewhat relaxed.

The main occupation of the Malayans in Kerala is exorcism. If any person is believed to be bewitched and possessed by a spirit an astrologer is first consulted who indicates the identity of the demon. For its exorcism the Malayans are invited. They perform various ceremonies

in which they wear masks, sing and dance, play drums and make music on a primitive pipe. They wear special dresses, according to the rite of exorcism which is used. One rite is obviously an imitation of a human sacrifice with a mock burial of the main performer. Malayans also function in various ceremonies at the major temples, where they even impersonate in suitable costumes minor deities and demons.

The profession of an exorcist does not keep the Malayans fully occupied. During other times, especially in the harvest season, they go begging. They assume various disguises of which the use of a hobby-horse is a common one.

A rather ambiguous position is held by the Marayans or Marans, who are temple servants and drummers on the Malabar coast. They are supposed to have come from Tamilnad where their existence as temple servants and drummers is recorded in historical documents. In Malabar they are also called Ochan. They have a fairly high social status. But in South Kanara and North Malabar they are still barbers serving the Nayar and other good castes. In Kottayam District they function as barbers and drummers and as funerary priests of the Nayar. Further south the Marayans function as Nayar priests, but have given up their work as barbers. There they call themselves Attikurassi.

The temple drummers, still called Marayan in South Malabar, feel much offended when reminded of their barber kinship existing in the north. They consider themselves just below the Brahmins and feel polluted if only touched by a Nayar. They lose caste if they eat food prepared by a Nayar. But the Nayar too have a long memory and claim to be defiled if they were to eat food prepared by a Marayan. At any rate, in Travancore the Nayar are considered socially of higher rank than the Marayans.

But the Marayans are a good example for the flexibility of the caste system. A change of occupation combined with a short memory helps to raise the social status of a community considerably !

The astrologers, medicine-men, priests, and singers in snake groves are in Kerala regarded low in social rank, and even the Kammalans and Ezhavas feel polluted by their touch. The name of the caste is Pulluvan. Their huts are built in the style and vicinity of the low castes of a village.

The Pulluvans firmly believe in the efficacy of magic and sorcery. Every-kind of sickness is attributed to the evil agency of some demon. They divine the nature of a demon's displeasure, and try to find out

what offerings must be made to appease the demon. Pulluvans also get possessed by demons and in that state prophesy. A Pulluvan and his wife may preside over ceremonies in propitiation of the snake gods. When the inmates of a house are threatened by the presence of snakes, a Pulluvan is called and he entices the snakes away through his exorcism and music which he performs with a string instrument to which a pot is attached as resonance body.

Though experts in exorcism, the Pulluvans for want of paying clients have often to supplement their earnings through field labour and timber cutting.

An altogether different form of temple service is the institution of female temple servants, usually combined with prostitution. It concerns the so-called Devadasis, Jogatis and Basavis of southern India; in the north they are called Kasbi, from *kasab*, prostitution. This temple service by females existed in India through many centuries; it was finally put to an end by the Indian Government. But it still lingers on in various regions.

In general, women were pressed into the temple service or dedicated by their parents in early adolescence, rarely did they dedicate themselves voluntarily. Originally the girls and women were genuinely dedicated to the service of the deity; it was only later and a gradual development that the institution of such temple servants was abused and degenerated into prostitution. First only the priests may have taken advantage of the religious and economic dependence of the female temple servants on them. Later these priests rented them out to serve the pleasure of outsiders for a fee. On the other hand, it appears that in certain castes always rather liberal views were held with regard to sex, and thus these temple servants were given great freedom in granting their favour to whomever they wished.

The duties of the 'handmaids of the deity'—Devadasis—were to render all services to a deity's image which were due to a great king or queen. In the morning the god had to be awakened, bathed and dressed. Then his worship was performed by the priests, while the Devadasis fanned the god with fly-whisks of Tibetan yak-tails, waved the sacred oil-lamps and sang and danced in front of the image. If there was a procession, the image of the deity was dressed up, placed on a throne and carried in a palanquin or chariot to another temple or simply through the streets of the town. Often the image of a god was carried out to meet the image of the god's consort in another temple. On its return, food was served to the deity, and the temple

servants sang and danced as during the banquet of a king. After some time during which the deity was supposed to have consumed the "essence" of the food, the Devadasis were permitted to fall to and eat the rest of the meal. In the evening the god was ceremoniously undressed, and finally put to rest for the night. The same services were rendered to a female deity.

There is no doubt that the Devadasis, instructed and guided by the temple priests, brought the arts of singing and dancing to high perfection. For a long time these arts have been in the sole custody of Devadasis who alone could and would undergo the long and arduous training in these highly developed arts. In course of time, however, as the *devadasi* institution came into disrepute owing to the sexually loose life of the dancers, the arts of singing and dancing themselves assumed an ill reputation and were practised increasingly more exclusively by courtesans and their supporting casts. From the temple the arts moved to the courts of the Rajas, the houses of the nobles and of wealthy towns people. It is fairly recent that the attitude of the Indian people has changed and singing and dancing, and the artists themselves, have attained a better reputation.

Inscriptions show that in 1004 A. D. the great temple of the Chola king Rajaraja at Tanjore had attached to it four hundred women of the temple who lived in free quarters in the surrounding streets, and were given a grant of land from the endowment. Other temples had similar arrangements.

In the beginning of the 19th century a hundred temple girls were attached to the temple of Conjeevaram, and at Madras, Tanjore and Conjeevaram there are still hundreds of them who receive allowances from the endowments of the big temples in those places. Not only the temples, also the state power took a share in the earnings of these girls. In the 15th century these women at Vijayanagar were living in state-controlled quarters the revenue of which went towards the upkeep of the police.

In northern India the dancing girls are usually of the Beria caste and are known as Bernis. In Bengal this type of women often become religious mendicants of the Vaishnava or Bairagi sect. They have a bad reputation and combine prostitution with their religious service. They are also addicted to drugs.

Accomplished singers and dancers, these women were often skilled entertainers and the literature of India in the Middle Ages shows that they had considerable influence on the male population belong-

ing to the higher classes, especially in the towns. Their social status was certainly not low. But the number of highly trained courtesans was always small; the ordinary prostitutes enjoyed no high rank, the more so because it was well known that they usually came from the low castes.

In present time the social position of the Devadasis and prostitutes as well depends much on the type of life these "Hand-maids of the Gods" are leading.

Thus in southern Maharashtra and in north-western Kanara, in particular in the Kolhapur and Sangli districts, in Belgaum, Dharwar and Bijapur districts, we find the institution of the Jogatis, devotees of the goddess Renuka. The Jogatis are of various type: One type consists of virgin girls bought by the temple priests for specific services of the goddess Renuka. In spite of their sacred function, these girls are forced to live as prostitutes serving the priests (whose property they are), but outsiders as well. Their children, if any, marry into low castes. No stigma is attached to them for their illegitimacy.

Parents offer these girls for temple service either out of devotion, in fulfilment of a vow or out of pecuniary expectations, since the Jogatis receive many presents.

Another type of Jogatis consists of married women who dedicate themselves to the service of Renuka out of devotion. They live at home in their families, and only occasionally serve in the temple. The wives of the temple priests often belong to this type.

A third type consists of common prostitutes dedicated to prostitution by their parents before reaching puberty. Their dedication to Renuka is only a pretence. They do not serve in the temple.

But it is claimed that since Indian independence the practice of dedicating girls to prostitution has largely been given up. Where it still persists it is in a few regions and restricted to certain low castes.

A fourth type consists of various persons, such as widows, retired prostitutes, even men, usually eunuchs (who dress like women), anxious to devote the rest of their life to the service of the goddess Renuka. The male Jogatis of this category learn to dance and perform during processions.

Most of the Jogatis are recruited from the low castes and untouchables. An exception are the devotees of the second category. Even Brahmin women are found among them.

But this cult institution has some ideological connection with the

low castes, as all Jogatis, at their initiation, must beg, and must visit the house of a tanner, in remembrance of the service of Matangi, a tanner's wife, rendered to Renuka Devi. Thus the service of Renuka is supported mainly by the low castes and Harijans.¹

The dancing girls at Goa were in pre-Christian time divided into Kalavants, Devlis, Adbatkis or half-slaves and Bandis or bonds-women. There were other numerous sub-divisions. Of them the Kalavants stood highest in social rank and were accomplished singers and dancers. They played an important role in the social and religious life of the Konkani Hindus. In the Goan temples they had the privilege of singing and dancing at the beginning of the festival. They were also hired for entertainment at weddings and other festivities. They guarded their privileges zealously against the encroachments of the other sections of the sorority.

A similar institution existed in Andhra, in particular in its Chittoor, Anantapur and Karnool districts. There the female temple servants were called Basavis. They were dedicated before puberty by their parents and married to a male god. The motive was the desire to get a son, or a cure from sickness, or the aversion of a threatening calamity. The custom was in vogue mainly among the impure Madigas, but also though less frequently among the Reddis, Naidus, Gollas and Vaddis.

A dedicated girl was well instructed in music and dancing. For she was supposed to serve on festive occasions in the temple. Often she got "possessed" by the deity. The dedication usually took place when the girl was about eleven or twelve years old. After her dedication she either lived as a virgin serving the deity, or she lived more or less permanently with one sex partner, as his concubine, or she could also live as a real prostitute and have as many men as she wished. The children of such women inherit the name and property of their mothers. No stigma was attached to their irregular sex life.²

¹B.R. Patel, 1977, 23-43.

²P. Rajyalakshmi a.o. 1976, 341-8.

CHAPTER 5

Low Castes and Untouchables in Village Service

1. Domestic Servants

There is no doubt that at least since Vedic times slavery existed in India. The slaves were divided into two main categories: slaves who worked in the fields and were permanently attached to a certain estate, and household slaves. These were again sub-divided into slaves who were the personal attendants of their masters and could enter even the inner quarters of the house, and slaves who worked around the house, in the courtyard and garden. While the field slaves commonly belonged to the untouchables, and often belonged to a nalien race and culture, the courtyard slaves too were often of low social status, while the house slaves usually belonged to the same race as their masters and were ritually pure. In ancient times until the arrival of the British and often much later most domestic work was performed by slaves, at least in the upper classes of Indian society. The less wealthy scarcely needed slaves as in the usually large families there was a sufficient number of persons to do all the work necessary in a household.

Even after the abolition of slavery, the old socio-economic set-up was not being changed at once, it continued in a modified form. Many domestic servants earned their living by attaching themselves to some big families and working for them. In the case of big landlords and small Rajas the domestic servants simply formed part of the motley crowd of their dependents.

These conditions have now disappeared and only traces of the old system have survived in the more far-off village communities which remained unscathed from the urbanising influence of cities and towns. The Rajas and big zamindars (landlords) too have largely disappeared or wandered off into the cities. Thus the domestic servants formerly engaged by these people have now to look out for other employment.

or for domestic service in the urban areas where there is a great demand for it.

Among these domestic servants there are, however, at least two kinds which are essential for certain services in the villages and are therefore still employed by all higher Hindu castes. These are the barbers and the washermen. Both these occupations are indispensable for certain ritual purifications which cannot be performed by a substitute. Washermen and barbers consequently continue to be in village service and are paid as village servants annually at harvest time mostly in kind either by the village community or by the individual patrons.

Even in the urban areas city people may employ their barbers and washermen in the old traditional manner. But modern hair-cutting and laundry shops have been opened in great numbers and find many customers. And such shops, as also the tailoring shops, are in cities no longer restricted to particular castes in the society; that is to say that a person owning a laundry business need not necessarily be a washerman by caste or one working in a hair-cutting shop need not be a barber. Such shops are not seldom owned and managed by other caste people. Tailor shops may be managed even by high-caste people.

A few examples may be shown: In Nepal where ancient customs survived longer than in India even, slavery was abolished only in 1926. Here domestic servants were usually slaves (*ghatri*). The owners of slaves were on their liberation compensated for their loss of slave labour by the State. As long as slavery had been legal any one becoming a slave lost his status as member of his natal caste or community and was henceforth simply known as Gharti. Today there are many Gharti families in the Nepal valley, and their social and economic status is similar to that of the Tamangs and Paharis, tribes that would seem to have furnished a strong proportion of the slaves kept by the aristocratic and wealthy families of the valley.

Many of these slaves were persons sold as children by their own parents or already born from slave parents. Others were prisoners of war, while a few had been enslaved for such crimes as incest.

The sizable Gharti community of the Nepal valley does not entirely or predominantly consist of families liberated only in 1926, for even in earlier times it had not been unusual for a master to give a favourite slave his freedom, and hence there are Gharti families which have been free for several generations.

The basic distinction between ritual and socio-economic status is

brought out by the fact that Ghartis are touchable even while still the absolute property of their masters, and were thus ritually superior to even the wealthiest member of an untouchable caste.¹

In Kinnaur, on the Tibetan border, the women of the carpenter caste (Cres or Bandhis) work as domestic servants in the households of wealthy landowners. Unlike the Kolis, the carpenters, though of low caste and economically dependent on the landlords, are not debarred from entering the houses of the higher castes.

The former slaves of the high-castes in Kumaon, on the other hand, the Doms, are untouchables. They could not be employed as domestic servants, but only as artisans and field labourers. Even now they are treated as serfs, tied to their masters through their debts which to repay they have to serve a life-time. Prior to the British rule, they could be bought and sold like slaves. In Kumaon they form about twenty per cent of the population. They are found practically in every village in a state of servitude and bound to perform most of the jobs for which in other regions an artisan would be needed. The Doms have never been integrated in the village community and the usual *jajmani* system was never applicable for them.

In northern India generally the fisherman castes are engaged in domestic service. From carrying passengers across rivers or to the boats on the high sea, the boatmen came to carry passengers in prerailway times in palanquins. Often great distances had to be covered and it was done by relay bearers. On such journeys the bearers had to arrange for the passengers' food and accommodation and often even to cook for them.

Fishermen, though originally of impure caste, became out of human necessity a clean caste that could touch with impunity members of the highest castes. From their hands the highest castes could accept all kinds of services and also water and cooked food. Thus in northern India the Bhois and Dhimars, and in Bengal the Kewats, were often engaged in domestic service. The Dhuris of Chhattisgarh, former palanquin bearers, also are now engaged in domestic service.

A host of domestic servants, mostly of low caste, were employed by the British colonial officers, the merchants and the military. British families had to have servants for various tasks in the household. Since wages for the servants were very low, they could well afford to employ a great number of them.

¹C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1966, 23f.

From them modern Indians in the Government and other services have taken over the custom of having many servants. These classes are now taking on the part the old nobles and landlords played in earlier times. In the cities where the caste system is much relaxed even impure caste members can get employment as house servants though usually not as cooks. But in Bihar even Dosadhs have found work as cooks. In Bengal they do house service, mainly in the cities. Also the Jaiswars, a sub-section of the Chamar caste work in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar as domestic servants in towns and cities. Other sections of the leather-workers and weavers too find similar employment.

In Bengal the Kaoras, formerly sweepers who abandoned their old calling, are now often engaged as house servants.

In many parts of India potters take service in large households. Under the ancient kings of Andhra potters were engaged as cooks and many still work in this capacity in Shudra houses.

Also the Kolis of Rajasthan do domestic service.

In Kathiawar and Gujarat there exists a caste of rice pounders, the Golas or Ranas. They claim to be of Rajput descent driven from Chitor in Mewar. But *gola* means slave; they were probably the domestic slaves of Rajput families who were driven from their homesteads by the Muslims along with their Rajput masters. Without doubt they have a strong admixture of Rajput blood.

Though the Golas rank among the first of the low caste Hindus, a certain contempt is attached to them, partly due to their unskilled profession, their love of drink and their poverty, and partly to their custom of riding donkeys. In central Gujarat, on Holi, a Gola is specially hired and grotesquely dressed up and paraded on a donkey's back, with the beating of drums.

Though the Golas observe carefully the Hindu customs and worship all the Hindu gods, they are held in little respect by the caste Hindus. A slovenly Vania is often called Gola, and the word is used as an expression of contempt.

The Golas generally make their living by pounding rice. However, with the import of mechanised rice mills, many Golas have lost their jobs and were forced to search for other service since they own no land which they could cultivate.

In Central India the Dhimars, the caste of inland fishermen, also do domestic service in the homes of wealthy and important people. Though of low caste, they are not polluting and even Brahmins can

accept water and cooked food from their hands. In the neighbouring districts other fishing castes perform domestic service wherever fishing does not earn them a living.

In Maharashtra not only the fishermen, but also the Deowalas who traditionally carry pictures of some deity around for worship and collect alms, nowadays often do house work. Their women look after the children of wealthy families. Also the Bedars and Ramoshis, two castes of casual labourers, like to work as house servants.

The Holeyas of Kanara, on the other hand, are so impure that their masters will not allow them into the inner rooms of their houses.

The Kapus of Nellore District employ Gamallas (distillers) as their cooks and domestic servants. On the occasion of feasts and weddings all menial service and cooking is done by Gamallas.

In Orissa, Andhra and Tamilnad a caste of domestic servants is in existence which is called Parivaram. It appears to be an occupational caste, and members of different castes having taken to domestic service have finally joined this caste. *Parivaram* means 'an army, a retinue,' and it is alleged that members of this caste were in the past soldiers. It is also believed that many Parivarams were originally Maravans, Toreyas or Besthas. The latter two castes are fishing castes. Thus like the Dhimars of Central India, here another fishing community seeks employment in domestic service. The Kotaris in South Kanara, the Paiks in Orissa, and the Khasas of Andhra also have supplied many recruits for this new occupational caste.

The caste is said to require all its members of both sexes to do such services for its masters as they might require. Persons of any caste above the Paraiyans are admitted into its ranks, and the men in it may marry a woman of any other caste engaged in the same kind of service.

Divorce is permitted. Adultery within the caste, or with the employer, is tolerated. But adultery outside the caste is severely punished. This was the custom at least a hundred years ago. No doubt, in modern times customs have changed somewhat, though not very much.

2. Village Watchmen and Messengers

The occupation of village watchmen which still employs a large number of people and is quite important all over India is really a relic of the past when villages were surrounded by a wall and had to

be alerted and protected against sudden raids and attacks from robbers and enemies. The walls had to be maintained and always kept in good repair. This was the task of the traditional village watchmen. Their office was often hereditary and it was usually reserved in a particular caste. The caste differed from region to region, but was generally of a low social level. Since certain impure and polluting tasks had to be performed by the watchmen as an essential part of their calling, such as the removal of the carcasses of cattle, etc. the watchmen were usually chosen from the untouchable castes or at least from low castes.

The village watchmen do practically the work of the police, and in many villages they still are the only authority looking for law and order. They report to the police stations regularly the arrival and departure of any visitors, especially strangers, the birth, marriage and death cases taking place in the village, epidemics, and in general any uncommon happening of possible significance and interest to the police. In a country like India where the police force is so utterly inadequate and where the population is so much exposed to the criminal propensities of individuals and whole groups, where since old times even criminal castes exist, the watchman is a kind of self-help and self-protection. He is even in modern time by no means superfluous.

In the towns and cities this self-help and self-protection has evolved a well-known system for the employment of watchmen at all bigger stores, banks, offices and even residential houses. These watchmen are employed and their wages paid by private agencies, the owners of the establishments. But in the villages the watchmen have frequently a semi-official position, and are subject to the control and supervision of the police or the revenue officials. They are paid partly by the Government and partly by the villagers. Traditionally this remuneration is given in kind: every farmer has to give the watchman a certain amount of grain at harvest time corresponding to the area cultivated and the harvested crop.

It has been a tradition in India to employ for the job of watchmen just such people, or members of such castes, who were known for their criminal inclinations. It was really a case of blackmail for a certain lump sum, ostensibly paid in reward for a duty well performed, while the thieves and robbers promised to abstain from any criminal act themselves and in addition to prevent others from doing any harm to the life and property of their clients. Moving in circles which habitually committed such offences and being well versed with the devices

and subterfuges of the law-breakers they were well able to hear of any such plans against their clients and to counteract them.

There are however also castes which are traditionally watchmen without any association with the predatory castes. Among these are former soldiers, policemen and other officials in towns and cities, and martial castes in villages which lost their traditional avocation when the British restored peace in war-torn India. Other castes seem to have been made watchmen more for the purpose of serving the officials visiting a village or for keeping the village clean by removing dead animals. While the watchmen of former martial character usually belong to respectable castes and employ impure castes for menial and degrading jobs at their own expense if necessary, the latter usually belong to the untouchable castes themselves.

Such a caste are the Dums in Kashmir. They are the village watchmen and police throughout the state. As such they wield considerable power and are in a position to harass the villagers. They claim descent from a Hindu king who became afraid of his numerous sons and distributed them all over Kashmir, giving them the well-paying job of supervision in the villages.

In the Himalayan hills of Kangra and Chamba two castes, the Barwalas (in the lower hills) and the Batwars (in the higher hills) act as watchmen and messengers. In Kangra they are also known as Kirawak or Kirauk—overseers of coolies. They also do fieldwork and generally are the true village menials. In addition to fieldwork, they also fill pipes, bear torches and carry palanquins at weddings. They receive fixed rates for their work. In the towns they do all kinds of service. Their social rank is very low, just above the sweeper.

The Ghatvals of Bihar, on the other hand, have become a separate caste because in the past they had taken over the guarding of the lower passes through the hills. They call themselves Mallahs, hillmen. The caste is probably an offshoot of the aboriginal Bhuiya tribe which was broken up into many widely dispersed isolated communities. Others claim that the Ghatvals are a section of the Mallahs or fishers and boatmen of the region. For their social rank is low, which would scarcely be the case if they descended from the Bhuiyas.

A more numerous community of this type is that of the Minas in Rajasthan who have a Muslim section of the same caste, the Meos. The Minas and Meos are spread all over the east and north of Rajasthan (Jodhpur, Jaipur, Bharatpur, Bikaner and Alwar) and the Punjab. They claim in former time to have been the rulers of a con-

siderable portion of the former State of Jaipur, if not of Alwar and Bharatpur also. Even now, they hold a dominant position among the agricultural castes of Rajasthan, and in Jaipur they were the traditional guardians of the palace and the state treasure. A Mina had the privilege of affixing the *tilak* on the forehead of the Raja of Jaipur in the enthronement ceremony, just as in Mewar this was done by a Bhil.

There is no doubt that the Minas, if not pure Rajputs, have been much impregnated by Rajput blood; this to such an extent that the Minas now claim to belong to this caste.

Broadly speaking they are divided into two social divisions: the Ujle (pure) and the Maile (impure) Minas. The Ujle Minas are again sub-divided into two sections, the Zamindaris and the Chaukidaris. The Zamindaris are mainly landlords and law-abiding, while the Chaukidaris used to be the terror of central India and carried their raids far south of the Vindhya.

They always retained a permanent residence; only the men used to set out on their expeditions, after Dasehra or Divali (in October) and return home before Holi (in March). They worked in small gangs of two to six men, seldom more. They dressed and behaved like Rajputs. Their chief hunting grounds were the Deccan, Bombay, Gujarat, Kathiawad and the Karnatik. They specialised in burglary. Highway robbery they committed rarely; this sort of crime was only employed when the plunder promised to be large.

At present the Chaukidaris have settled down to their traditional function of guarding the villages. In the past they considered themselves higher in rank than the Zamindaris, who had settled down to peaceful cultivation, and they used to take their brides from them without giving their daughters in return. Now, however, the Zamindaris have advanced in prosperity and refuse to recognise the Chaukidaris either as their superiors or even as their equals. Years ago they had in this the support of the Raja of Alwar who did his best to save the more reputable of his Mina subjects from the disturbing influence of their turbulent tribal fellows.

In the south of Rajasthan, the Minas enjoy a lower status than up north, and in Marwar some rank as village menials of the impure kind, the Maile Minas. In the vicinity of the hill tracts they are also hunters and fowlers. Their social status is obviously dependent on the employment which they hold.

Almost the same can be said of the Bhils, who in Gujarat serve as

watchmen under the sub-title of Vasavos, a name applied to the Bhils in the western Satpuras.

In Bihar and in West Bengal the large caste of Dosadhs who in the north belong to the Chamars undertakes the duties of watchmen. This community is very mixed. It has obviously a strong strain of Mongoloid blood, for many Dosadhs have a yellowish brown complexion, and wide expanded nostrils, even slightly turned-up noses. At present the caste admits members of the higher Hindu castes into its ranks. It employs degraded Brahmins for ordinary ritual purposes, but at the chief festival of the caste, in honour of Rahu, the demon of eclipse and their chief deity, one of the Dosadhs officiates. The caste is divided into eight sub-divisions which interdine, but do not intermarry.

The Dosadhs work as carriers, watchmen, grooms, elephant-drivers, grass and wood cutters, even as cooks. The Dosadhs are said to be inclined to laziness, and are often accused of thieving. Their social status is very low.

In Bengal the Dosadhs repudiate any connection with the Chamars or weavers. They no longer work in leather or at the loom; nor do they eat carrion. They do not allow their women to practise midwifery. Many of them work as house servants. But on the whole they are still on good terms with the Chamars and live next to them in the villages. Now many Dosadhs go to the cities to work in the factories.

The Mals of western Bengal (117,704 in 1961) were in the past largely engaged with watching the crops and villages, as many of its sections were thieves and wandering pilferers. Now they are generally cultivators. They are completely Hinduised. Their social status is low, equal to that of the Bagdis.

The Kotals of West Bengal (7,700 in 1961) perform by tradition the duties of village watchmen. For this they receive a small piece of rent-free land in remuneration. They are cultivators and field labourers.

They are Saiva Hindus and venerate Kali as their main goddess. Degraded Brahmins serve them as their priests. They observe the Hindu food taboos. In social rank they are equal to the Namasudras from whom they might descend. Gulhak, the traditional ancestor of the Chandalas, is also their own ancestor.

A caste which has been employed as watchmen more in order to bribe its members into good behaviour than from confidence in their efficiency as guardians are the Khangars of Bundelkhand, now few in

numbers. They are sub-divided into a respectable farming section and another which provides watchmen and labourers to the villages.

The Khangars were originally probably one of the aboriginal tribes of the Vindhya. One section of them was Hinduised and enlisted into the local forces by the Rajputs who earlier had driven the tribesmen from their hill strongholds. This section enjoys a good social status and has severed all connections with the Khangar watchmen.

The latter section has retained its original customs and religion, does not employ Brahmins and had a sufficiently bad reputation to make its enlistment as watchmen (*kotwal*) advisable.

The Dahaits of Jabalpur and Mandla districts in Central India are probably a sub-section of the Khangars. According to their own tradition they have the same ancestor as the Khangars, while the Mandla branch claims that its ancestors were the doorkeepers of the Raja of Mahoba, from which place they were brought to Mandla about 300 years ago.

The Dahaits work generally as watchmen, but also as messengers, porters and stone breakers. They are not in a low social position and accept food and water only from the high castes. As former personal attendants of the Raja they had and have a good social status.

All over the Deccan it is the Mahar caste that carries out the tasks of watchmen and village messengers. Their number is considerable; in 1961 it amounted to 824, 183, in Maharashtra and the adjoining states.

Until recent times the Mahar was in spite of his low caste status an important village functionary. He was in many villages the watchman and guardian of the village, and its living chronicle. In the past troubled times when the villages of the Deccan were frequently raided by soldiers and robbers alike, the Mahar had to see that the mudwalls surrounding the village were in good repair and that the gate leading into the village was secure. He had to check whoever entered or left the village. During harvest time he had to guard the grain on the fields. When government and police officials or other visitors came, he had to look after their welfare, provide lodgings and meals for them. Of course, as an untouchable he could not cook for them; this had to be done by a member of a higher caste. He had to carry messages and letters, summon persons the officials wanted to see, and lead the visitors to the next village. He had to assist the revenue officers in collecting the taxes. He had to keep the village clean, repair the shelter for strangers, keep the gate into the village in good order and

remove all dead animals from the village precincts. It was his task to skin dead cattle, buffaloes and goats and he could claim the skins as his property. To the horror of the higher castes, the Mahar also ate the flesh of these dead animals.

For all these functions the Mahar received, along with certain artisan castes and other village servants, an annual remuneration in cash and kind, and often in addition a piece of land which he could cultivate. This remuneration was called *baluta* and the land bestowed on him *vatan*.

The *baluta* system is similar to the *jajmani* system of north India, but it differs from it. The *balutedar* is a village servant and responsible to the whole village community, whereas the *jajman* is dependent on an individual or a particular family.

In Maharashtra and in the southern Deccan the Bedars or Berads are often employed as watchmen. They appear to be of aboriginal stock as they have generally a flat nose, frizzled hair and a dark complexion. It is known that originally the Bedars were hunters and fowlers in the Karnatic. They might be related to the Boyas, one section of whom pursues the same calling, or the Vedar of Tamilnad who are still hunters and food-collectors. But about two centuries ago the Bedars improved their economic and social status when they were recruited in large numbers into the armies of the Muslim chiefs of Mysore and Hyderabad, in which they served until the defeat of the latter.

Bedar means 'plunderer'. In the past they marched with the armies and formed their foraging parties. They had to supply the army with grain and wood. With the consolidation of the British rule peace came to India, the armies were largely disbanded and the Bedars settled on waste lands as farmers, while others found employment as village watchmen. A few of them are now owners of large estates, many are landowners in a small way, farmers, cattle-herders, field-labourers, domestic servants and otherwise occupied. While many are honest and hard-working, the caste as such still has the reputation of being addicted to crime. In the time of the Pindharis certainly, the Bedars were not innocent of gang and highway robbery, burglary and petty thefts, crop stealing, sheep and cattle lifting, and house-breaking.

The Bedars are Hindus by religion, and in Kanara and Telengana employ men of the Satani caste as their priests. The Maratha Bedars are slightly superior in caste and are served by Brahmins. Though low of caste, the Bedars are superior to the Mahars and at least in

Maharashtra are admitted into the temples.

In the Maratha country, especially near the Sahyadri range, the place of the Bedars is taken by a similar caste, also from the south, known as Ramoshi, a title which is supposed to mean *Ranyasis*, or forest dwellers. They address each other, however, as Boyalis, which would suggest Telengana parentage. Socially they stand higher than the Bedars, and employ by preference the Jangam priests of the Lingayat sect, with a Gosain for their religious and moral instruction. The functions of the priest appear more necessary than effective.

The Ramoshis have been dacoits and robbers from times immemorial. By the age of seven, the Ramoshi boy must have stolen something or he is disgraced. If caught and convicted, the halo thereby acquired renders him a prize in the marriage market for which an unusually high dowry has to be offered. But with the march of civilisation and the greater control of the police they have now settled to a more regular and law-abiding life, seeking employment as village and field watchmen, field-labourers, domestic servants, coolies and even as farm tenants.

They live in houses on the outskirts of towns and villages. In physical appearance they do not differ much from the other village population; they are tall, strong, of dark complexion, with rather coarse features. They are fond of liquor. A peculiar tenet of the caste is that they only eat meat of animals killed by Muslims.

Frequently employed as watchmen and village messengers in Gujarat, in the Deccan and in Kanara are the Mangs. In social status they are even lower than the Mahars. In the past they had to live outside the village, and could not enter the village without the permission of its head. They had to remove the dead bodies of strangers, to execute criminals and they had the right to take away and appropriate for themselves the clothes and bedding of the dead.

They castrate bulls, beat drums at village festivals, and also make brooms and mats of the date-palm. They keep leeches for bleeding. Their wives act as midwives for the higher castes. They also do leather work and generally accept all the impure and unpleasant jobs which other people refuse to do. Some Mangs are criminals, and commit thefts and robberies. They are not averse to do scavenging also.

They are regarded as untouchables and Brahmins refuse to officiate in their religious ceremonies. They acknowledge no food taboos and will eat anything. They are very fond of tobacco and also smoke hemp (*ganja*), and are much addicted to liquor. The social status of the

Mangs is of the lowest. They have to live in separate quarters of the village and cannot draw water from the public well. They may not enter temples. Like the Mahars, the Mangs too had in the past to wear a spittoon around the neck so as not to pollute a member of the high castes through his spittel.

A traditional animosity exists between Mangs and Mahars though the two castes always live in close vicinity to each other. But in present time there are no open fights between Mangs and Mahars anymore.

In Orissa, the Kondras are the village watchmen; but they also do field-labour and fisning. They derive their name from their skill in archery, and in former times formed a militia together with the Pankas. Socially they are quite low. Though Brahmins serve them in some of their religious ceremonies, they also have their own caste priests for their traditional feasts and rituals. Officially they are Vaishnavas, but worship also the local village deities.

In southern Ganjam the village watchmen are called Bariki. It is their duty to guide travellers from one place to the other. They also must keep the village meeting place clean and look after the wants of visiting officials. At harvest time the Barikis have to guard the crops on the fields and on the threshing floor.

The main village watchmen and general messengers in the Carnatic are the Holeyas. In these capacities they are known as Chalavadis and Kalavadis. The Chalavadis act as servants of the right-hand castes, convening their meetings whenever required. They are also the custodians of the symbols of these castes, the bell and the ladle. They are made of brass, and are connected together by a chain of the same metal. A Chalavadi carries the ladle on his right shoulder and heads the procession of all the right-hand section people, sounding the bell with the shaking of the chain. These insignia are also displayed at caste assemblies and at a wedding of a member of the right-hand section castes. They are placed before the Sangameswara Gaddige and worshipped. The spoon has on it engraved the badges of different castes composing the right-hand section, such as the plough of the Vekkaliga, the scales of the Banajiga, the shears of the Kuruba, the spade of the Vedda, the razor of the barber, the washing stone and the pot of the Agasa, and the wheel of the Kumbara. They also show the image of a bull flanked on either side by the sun and the moon. At the foot of the spoon are also engraved the figures of an ass and a Basavi.

Holeyas are in general the chief agricultural labourers of the

Carnatic. They correspond to the Telugu Mala and the Tamil Parayan. They form a tenth of the whole population in this State and are found in almost every part of it.

The Holeyas were the former slaves in Kanara and were emancipated only in the middle of the 19th century. Certain sections were house servants, though not permitted to enter the inner rooms of their masters' houses, while others were field slaves who were attached to a particular plot of land and were sold along with the field. The latter knew the boundaries of a field well and their statements, taken under oath, were accepted as true in court in a case of land dispute.

The daily maintenance for a male slave was one kilo (*seer*) of rice and a sixth less than a kilo for a woman. On feast days the fare was doubled. Annually their masters gave them a piece of cloth to cover their bodies, and the owners also had to arrange for their marriage. The master either bought a girl for a boy slave from outside or he gave him a girl from among his own slaves. The treatment of slaves depended much on the personal character of the master; on the whole it was not too bad. Sometimes slaves were rented out for work. The Ikkeri princes of Kanara had many slaves, acquired by conquest or otherwise. They employed them in the gardens and fields or in repair work for the forts.

The Holeyas belong to the untouchable castes. They cannot enter a temple nor the houses of the high-castes; they cannot use public wells, and no barber or washerman will serve them. In former time they had to keep at a distance from Brahmins. But the Holeyas look down on the Madigas and do not eat with them, for the latter do leather-work and scavenging.

The Holeyas follow the Hindu religion and are either Saivites or Vaishnavas. But in the veneration of the village goddess they act as priests sacrificing the buffalo and other animals in honour of the goddess.

The Holeyas, after emancipation from slavery, still form the backbone of agricultural labour in Kanara. Some own land themselves. But they have also adopted other occupations, such as rope-making, weaving, guarding fields and villages, service in the army or in government offices.

The type of permanent occupation which they follow gives rise for particular endogamous sub-divisions, though many such divisions are of a territorial character. Each section consists of a number of exogamous clans which have animal or plant totems.

Marriage may be adult or infant, and there is a strong preference for infant marriage, in imitation of the higher castes. In the time of slavery a kind of temporary marriage, or concubinage, was common among the Holeyas, and it is still practised. Divorce and widow remarriage are permitted. Marriage ties are rather loose, but have a tendency of getting stronger, as the Holeyas aim at a higher social status. But they still dedicate some of their daughters to a temple as Basavis and these girls or women may then live as concubines or prostitutes, without losing their social status in the caste.

Members of the Holey caste usually live together in a separate hamlet, called Holageri. They do not welcome members of the higher castes within their quarters.

On the other hand, the Morasu Okkalu, who also act as watchmen and conductors of water in the villages of Kanara, have a caste status which is much higher. They are mainly cultivators and on equal terms with the Okkaligas. Brahmins serve them, though they also invite Satanis and other lower orders of priests to perform their rites. They eat meat, even pork, and drink liquor, though sparingly. They permit divorce, but do not always allow divorcees and widows to remarry. They can however live in concubinage with a man of their own caste. Offspring of such unions are forced to marry among themselves.

In Andhra, in the Vizagapatam tracts especially, the traditional village watchmen belong to the Kangara or Khongar caste. As notorious robbers and thieves who used a century ago to raid in large gangs a village or hamlet, they were induced by the villagers to act as their watchmen against a fixed remuneration. Wherever a theft or robbery occurred, the Khongar employed in the village as watchman, was usually able to find out the thieves and, against an adequate reward, to recover the stolen goods.

Another caste of village watchmen, agricultural labourers and weavers in the Vizagapatam District are the Paidis. They may be a sub-caste of the Dombs or Panos. They are untouchables and not allowed to enter a Hindu temple. They are not averse to committing robberies. They are often employed as watchmen to protect the houses from theft and robbery.

The Mutrachas, on the other hand, had a more reputable past. They are found chiefly in the Kistna, Nellore, Guntur, Cuddapah and North Arcot districts. In the past they were employed by the Vijayanagar kings to defend the boundaries of their dominions. They were

given the honorary title of Paligar (village headman), while Mutracha, a Dravidian word, is probably derived from a former Mutu Raja, a ruler of a region in Andhra.

In spite of their honourable past, the Mutrachas have a low social status, perhaps because they do not observe the common Hindu food restrictions. They eat meat and drink liquor, and often live together without a formal marriage.

In present time they are generally poor and earn their living as small farmers and village watchmen. It is said that in the past a few Mutrachas were owners of large estates, and in consequence aspired to Rajput rank, but with little success.

The Ekaris, also called Ekali, Yakari or Yakarlu, are a caste of cultivators and village watchmen. They are found mainly in Cuddapah District (Andhra) and in North Arcot (Tamilnad). In the past they were hunters and forest dwellers, and some of them seem to have been village headmen who employed members of their caste as policemen.

They do not wear the sacred thread, but Brahmins perform the religious ceremonies for them. They eat meat. But it is also alleged that originally they were cotton scutchers, and that their name is derived from *yekuta*, to clean cotton. But by abandoning their profession and taking up cultivation, they have improved their social position. They are now on par with the other cultivating castes.

In the south-eastern Tamil districts the Ambalakkharar were formerly hunters, but have now settled in the Hindu villages and hold a respectable village position as watchmen and farmers. Their kinsfolk, the Muttiyar, are said to have been soldiers of Vijayanagar. When the wars came to an end, they were forced to settle down and were given the task of guarding the villages. Some consider them a subsection of the Mutrachas. The Mutrachas, however, are from Andhra, and the connection therefore may be no more than a similarity of name and of former occupation.

3. Weavers

Already in the time of Alexander were the people of India wearing cotton garments and do so still. No wonder, therefore, that into modern time the craft of handloom weaving was one of the most widely distributed in the country, and formed the traditional calling of castes numbering even in those early times millions of workers. In

its most flourishing time the craft reached a wonderful pitch of skill and refinement, especially under the patronage of the Moghul court which monopolised the whole of the Dacca output of "flowing water", "gossamer" and other choice muslins, an art of weaving which has long been lost. Even the ordinary fabrics of the Gulf of Cambay, the Malabar and Coromandel coasts always found a ready market in Europe and the Middle East.

Tavernier, a French traveller of the 17th century, writes that the city of Burhanpur, in Central India, which he visited in 1641 and again in 1658, had a brisk trade in cotton goods. Very transparent kinds of muslin, woven at Burhanpur, were then exported to Persia, Turkey, Muscovie, Poland, Arabia, Grand Cairo and other places. Some of these muslins, dyed in various colours and with flowers, were used in Europe by women for veils and scarves. Fabrics beautifully woven with silk and gold and silver threads, and having no reverse, were exported to Poland, being in great demand there.¹

Nevertheless, the weaving communities themselves never seem to have been prosperous. Before the end of the 18th century they were reported by British officials to be a 'timid and helpless' folk, and even then were, as recent experience has proved them to be still, particularly vulnerable to the threat of famine, when a wide-spread failure of the crops reduced or stopped the purchasing power of the peasantry. Since the time of the British the market has been seriously curtailed by the competition of factory-produced goods and it is only in the coarser line of material that they hold their own. . .

The weavers are not among the menials of the village who are entitled to a customary share of the harvest, but are paid for each piece of cloth they make and sell. With one or two exceptions, the weaving castes occupy a lower position than the nature and utility of their function would warrant. This is perhaps due to the fact that the weaver with the leather-workers and potters, and other artisans, originally belonged to the pre-Aryan races who were subjugated and treated as slaves and serfs by the Aryan conquerors. At the time of their invasion of India cotton might have been unknown to the Aryans and they had therefore no use for the occupation of weaving.

It is perhaps also significant that weaving and leather-working often go together and leather-workers change into weavers and vice versa. Both castes are employed as village watchmen whose task it is to

¹J. B. Tavernier, 1889, 51.

skin dead cattle. Often they eat carrion. Weavers as well as leather-workers were in the past often employed as grooms and drivers of horse carriages. This again proves their close connection. And since working in leather is so objectionable to the Hindu mind, the weaver too suffers the same disabilities.

Thus just below the Jammu hills in Kashmir there is a caste called Meg or Meng (in Rawalpindi). The Megs are weavers as well as leather-workers. Their social rank is slightly higher than that of the Chamars. But the Megs also work as coolies and do casual field labour.

Also in the Himalayan mountain districts of Kinnaur, for instance, the Kolis (called Chamang in the east) are not only the weavers, but also the leather workers of the region. No distinction is made between the two professions, while in the plains the two professions are carried out by two different castes. In Kinnaur the Kolis are also the musicians and they play on festive occasions, for weddings and funerals. But they are invited for purely secular feasts only; they are not allowed to play at religious functions. This is the prerogative of the blacksmiths and carpenters.

The Kolis also remove the carcasses of dead animals from the village precincts. In the past they also skinned dead animals and ate their flesh. Though recently they have abandoned this custom they are still treated as impure and kept at a distance.

In summer many Kolis work in the fields of the farmers for wages, and only in the long winter months they weave the wool spun by all castes into cloth. All clothing annually required by the family is thus produced by the Kolis.

In Kulu, the Kolis are also called Daghis. The word *daghi* is supposed to be derived from *dagh*, meaning cattle. The caste takes care of the dead cattle and removes it from house and stable. In former times the Daghis also removed the skin from the carcasses and ate the flesh. Eating carrion has been given up long ago by the Daghis, yet the impurity resulting from this habit still clings to them.

In Kulu the Kolis or Daghis are either independent cultivators with small landholdings or they perform all kinds of menial service for their high-caste masters. They are either field servants, and musicians on festive occasions. In Kulu too they may not play at temple feasts.

They are treated as ritually impure, that is, they are not permitted to enter the houses of the high castes, to eat, drink or smoke with

them, to enter temples and to take part in a sacrifice together with the high castes, to mix with them at public feasts and temple fairs. They celebrate their feasts separately, though they may act as drummers and musicians in the background when the high castes celebrate. Discrimination between the upper and lower castes is more strictly observed in Kulu than in Spiti and Lahoul, probably, because Kulu is more dominated by Hinduism.

There is not only caste discrimination between the upper and lower castes, but also among the low castes as such. The Thawis (masons and carpenters) and the Darchis (the professional swimmers and boat men of these regions), though Scheduled Castes, do not mix with the Daghis, and the latter keep aloof of Chamars and Poombas (cotton cleaners). However, the social status of the individual castes in the hierarchy of the low castes differs from district to district. In some districts the blacksmiths rank socially higher than the basket-makers; in other districts they are lower. It depends much on the type of work a particular caste is doing. Wherever a caste community has been able to acquire fields and to live as independent cultivators, their social status has improved. Those who are economically dependent on others and work for grain and other foodstuff, are classed in a lower rank.

In Kulu, the Daghis are not weavers by profession, as spinning and weaving are carried out by all castes in their leisure time, especially in winter. The Kulu people are skilled in making rugs and in weaving blankets. Their handwoven shawls enjoy a good market.

When fieldwork is slack the Daghis often seek employment as porters or do forest and road work. Thus they are often absent from their homes for months, as they have to seek work outside in other districts.

The Kolis in the neighbouring Mandi District of Himachal Pradesh are said to have come with the Rajputs as their menials and serfs when the latter gave way to the invading Mohammedans and fled into the mountains. In physical appearance there is not much difference between them and the higher castes. In fact, there is much racial mixture. For, in these hills many high-caste men take Koli girls as their concubines. The offspring of such unions become of course Kolis. But in recent time the descendants of such unions in Mandi have formed a new sub-caste, calling themselves Sucha (pure) Kolis. They claim a higher social status, refuse to do any other work than field work, refuse menial jobs and do not interdine and intermarry

with the rest of the Kolis. In fact, the Rajputs and Kanets of Mandi treat this sub-section almost as equals.

But in general the Kolis belong to the 'untouchable' castes in Mandi. They perform all the menial services for the higher castes, and play the drum and other musical instruments for their secular entertainment. They live in separate hamlets and are not allowed to enter the temples and houses of the higher castes. The latter do not accept water and cooked food from them, nor do they smoke with them.

Spinning and weaving wool is done by all castes in the rural areas of Mandi; it is not a specific profession of the Kolis. But cotton weaving is done by low caste weavers only. They are, however, people of the plains, and not Kolis.

Conditions are more or less the same in other districts of Himachal Pradesh.

Not only in the Himalayan hills, elsewhere too the weavers are often occupied with fieldwork. Especially during the sowing and harvesting seasons do the weavers leave the loom and go to the fields when many hands are needed to prepare the soil for sowing, or to do the weeding and the reaping of the crops. This seasonal occupation with fieldwork seems to be an old traditional custom and is shared with other menial castes like the leather workers and potters.

But in some regions the weavers rank highest among these castes since cotton in itself is not impure or defiling, while the other low castes may be engaged in work with impure material. Perhaps the best instance of this status is found in the Tantis of lower Bengal who enjoy a rank much higher than any other weaving castes and even intermarry, when sufficiently wealthy, with castes like the Kayasths. The Tantis are, however, immigrants from another region; their low-caste origin was therefore not known in lower Bengal which is not a cotton-growing tract and where the weaving industry was introduced from outside. Their occupation apparently merited a good social position in consideration of their skill and utility, and they got it from the Hindu population who was ignorant of the fact that elsewhere the weavers are treated as outcastes and untouchables.

In the Moghul times many of the Koris, the weavers of upper India must have turned Mohammedan. These Muslim weavers, very numerous in the northern regions, are now called Julaha. The Julahas have preserved many characteristic traits of their former caste. They have a number of territorial sub-divisions the names of which are derived either from the area from which they come, from the original

caste, from an ancestor or any other name. In contrast to the Hindu Koris, the Muslim Julahas have the reputation of being troublesome and rowdy people. Many proverbs and sayings describe them as rather stupid persons, while the Julaha women are known to be very bold and quarrelsome.

The Gadarias are originally a shepherd caste. But in the north they have given up this occupation and are now engaged in the weaving of blankets out of the wool of sheep and goats. They are therefore also known as Kambalia, from *kambal*, blanket.

In Spiti the weavers are called Burrarar. They are an impure caste and are avoided even by the Buddhists who generally do not observe caste. Untouchability must be based on race or on the fact that they are immigrants, for weaving as such is not an impure occupation in Spiti. In fact, some men in Spiti and Lahoul are well skilled in weaving. No social stigma is attached to this trade and it can be carried on by any man or woman.

Some weaving castes, on the other hand, occupy a higher position in the caste hierarchy, such as the Khatris or Patvegaras of South Kanara, who always used silk as their material and not cotton. The Patvegaras even wear the sacred thread and employ Brahmins for their religious functions. They are probably immigrants from Bombay; they speak a mixture of Marathi, Gujarati and Hindi. A similar caste in Tamilnad is that of the Pattunurkarar who also seem to have found their way from Malwa to the south by devious routes and with many halts.

But the mere specialisation of the weavers to silk does not in itself always improve their rank in caste; for the Tantvas in Bihar rank far below the Tantis though they use silk as their weaving material. It is probably their breeding of the silk-worm which degrades them. On the other hand, the use of coarser material does seem to lower the caste rank of the weavers, for those weavers who weave jute or hemp occupy definitely the lowest ranks within the weaving caste. Such weavers are the Perikes and Janappans in South India, the Kapalis of Bengal and the Dhors of the Deccan.

In West Bengal there are 6,760 Mahars whose principal occupation is the weaving of coarse cloth. But at present many work in the textile factories. They are also village watchmen and casual labourers.

Their social status is very low; in fact, they rank with the Chamars and Doms. They are obviously immigrants from Maharashtra.

Another such weaving caste of West Bengal is that of the Pans or Sawais (3,370 in 1961). Their social status is low, just a little better than that of the Haris (scavengers). They also do basket-making.

There is a Muslim weaving caste in Manbhum called Jolha. It is obviously a branch of the Julahas of northern India, for it is also Mohammedan. The Jolhas weave a coarse kind of cloth from mill-made yarn bought in the nearest markets. The Jolhas weave with two heddles, thus they can work faster and produce a cheaper cloth, though of a coarse kind.

But weaving is no more the main occupation of the Jolhas. Nowadays they depend more on agriculture, casual labour, business, etc. as their main source of income. Weaving scarcely supports a family for one month in the year, the Jolhas state.

The unit for production is the family. A fair amount of mutual co-operation is necessary to survive. Among the weaving Jolhas there is clearly a division of labour. Women help the men in washing and drying the yarn, in winding the yarn on spools, in sizing the thread, etc. But the actual weaving is a man's task.

The Jolhas have a caste council, with three officials who can impose fines on caste offenders.

They are of low social status, below the Kamars (ironsmiths) but they are not untouchables.

The Tanti weaving caste of Manbhum weaves a cloth of finer texture than that of the Jolhas. There is a section of the Tantis who weave silk cloth. But this type of weaving is on the verge of disappearance because it cannot compete with imported silk products. Formerly the rearing of the silkworm was extensively practised by three forest tribes, the Mahatos, Bhumijas and Santals. But this has been given up, and there is scarcely any material for the silk weaver.

The cotton cloth woven by the Tantis is relatively fine and more highly priced. But for everyday use the villagers prefer the coarse cloth of the Jolhas.

The Tantis too cannot do their weaving throughout the year. They must complement it by field-work, other labour or trade.

The Tantis who are Hindus perform annually the Visvakarma puja. Each Tanti household performs it separately. A (degraded) Brahmin is the chief priest. An image of Visvakarma is worshipped.

The Tantis are divided into sections which are not all yet endogamous. The silk weavers, Taseira Tantis, claim highest rank.

Each section has its caste council with a single headman, and can

impose fines for a breach of the exogamy or endogamy laws, for slaughtering a cow or other such caste offences.

In Manbhum there is also a caste of wool-weavers, the Jugis. It is a very small caste restricted to a few villages in Bihar and West Bengal. The Jugis claim a higher caste status than usually accorded to wool weavers in India. The Jugis claim social equality with the Brahmins and Vaishnavas.

They have a rather primitive type of loom, similar to that of the Adis in north-eastern India. The Jugi women do most of the work preparing the thread for the weaving, they wash the wool, card it, bow and spin it, dye it etc. But the weaving is left to men.

The Jugis prefer to sell their wares by peddling them in different villages or attending the big markets in the near-by towns. Only in case of necessity they sell cloth through intermediaries and merchants.

The weavers prove to be very adaptable to their environment. The Pankas of eastern central India and the adjoining Orissa hills, for instance, now reside among the aboriginal Gonds. They have adopted many of their customs, do the weaving of coarse cloth which the Gonds prefer and also cultivate fields either as tenants or field servants. But even the Gonds treat them as untouchables and force them to live in separate hamlets like the other impure castes. Many of the Pankas have joined the Kabir Panth, like the leather-workers of the region, though they find it hard to live up to the lofty ideals of this sect.

A little to the north of the Panka habitat and mostly residing in the plains, there is another weaving caste, the Gandas. They too live together with aboriginal tribes; but they have largely abandoned weaving for cultivation. They also act as village watchmen and as drummers.

To the south of the Panka area, across the hills, there is the caste of the Dombas, living with the hill tribes and sharing their primitive habits. Their name suggests that they belong to the great Dom caste of the north of the Ganges. They may have strayed into the Deccan and the Karnatic at some time of the past. Like the Pankas they are classed with the lower menials of the village and perform the same servile functions.

It appears that originally the weavers and the leather-workers formed one people; in fact, the same caste worked either in leather or at the loom. This may be one of the reasons for the low rank of the weavers, for the working of skins is polluting to the Hindus, while

there is no obvious reason why weaving should be ritually impure. In more recent time, however, the weavers have disassociated themselves from the leather-workers and both artisan castes became independent units. Thus the Koris, who with the Julahas form the chief weaving caste in northern India, are now quite detached from the Chamars, the main leather-working caste from which, according to their own tradition, they sprung. But after being so long with the leather-workers, the odium of impurity clings to the weavers and they cannot cast it off anymore.

Moreover, the weavers are associated with certain other habits which they have not abandoned, such as removing dead cattle from the villages, eating beef and carrion, and acting as watchmen and village servants. Since these services are remunerative, even the weavers are reluctant to give them up merely for social prestige.

The Julahas are a good example of how a low caste may rise in social hierarchy. Originally Chamars, they secured a better position by first changing their religion and adopting Islam. Then they gave up leather-work and took to weaving. They touched no carcasses and forbade strictly eating carrion. They could not reconcile this anymore with their new dignity as Muslims. Though the stigma of impurity has not been completely deleted from them, and even Muslims treat them not fully as equals, they have a chance of rising further, for, as the saying goes, "Last year I was a Julaha; this year, a Sheikh, and next year, if the harvest is good, I shall be a Sayyid."

There is no such chance for the Koris who have remained faithful to their Hindu religion and are not prepared to leave it for Islam.

Julahas as well as Koris usually weave coarse, hand-spun yarn into cloth of inferior quality, and though the more conservative classes of the Indian population still buy cloth from them, the factory-produced and more durable modern cottons are getting more popular, and the Julahas and Koris are slowly losing their customers.

Some Kori sub-sections have joined the Kabirpanthis, while others venerate both the local deities of the Hindus as well as the popular Muslim saints of the region. This practice is reciprocated by the Julahas who, though Muslims, also worship Bhawani Mata on her feast.

Both castes, the Julahas and the Koris, are of low social rank. Both are the proverbial fools of Hindu literature. Weavers are ridiculed not only as stupid rustics, but also as cowards and braggards.

Perhaps they are looked down on by the other castes because their occupation is rather a woman's work, like that of the tailor in the West, who plays a similar role.

Both communities have little caste and family solidarity, and a rather low reputation in matters of sex and honesty. The Julahas are in addition quite obstreperous and quarrelsome, while the Koris are more yielding and timid of their superiors, though among themselves and in their families they are equally quarrelsome and demanding.

In Rajasthan and central India the place of the Kori is occupied by the Balahis, a caste much on the same social level as the Chamars or leather-workers. In central India they are treated as untouchables, and are employed as village watchmen, daily labourers and tenants, and only a few of them earn their livelihood as weavers.¹

In Rajasthan there are three different weaving castes, the Balais, the Mahars and the Kolis. Probably they are only three different subsections of one caste, because the Balais are often also addressed as Mahar. Both these castes are untouchable, both are weavers who weave the coarse cotton cloth worn by various tradition-bound backward castes and tribes.

The Balais are weavers, but many do fieldwork. They are not allowed by their caste council to do sweeper and leather work, which is reserved for Bhangis and Chamars respectively. On the other hand, the higher castes prevent the Balais from adopting more respectable jobs, and object to it strongly if Balais open only a *pan* and *biri* shop, selling betelnut and cigarettes. The caste Hindus keep Balais at a distance and do not allow them entrance into their temples nor to fetch water from their wells. Barbers and washermen do not serve them.

The second weaving caste of Rajasthan is that of the Mahars. Besides weaving, they also work as porters, field labourers and domestic servants. Their social position is low. They are treated as untouchables.

Their economic situation is precarious because hand-woven cloth cannot compete with mill-woven cloth, in spite of the active encouragement of the Indian Government.

The third traditional weaving caste in Rajasthan is that of the Kolis. But most of them too have abandoned weaving and are engaged in agriculture, in domestic and field service, in carding and trading cotton. Kolis are not allowed by their caste council to do sweeping

¹S. Fuchs, 1950.

and leather work. They claim Rajput descent and pretend to be at the top of the low castes. Indeed, they do not accept food and water from the untouchables. But on the other hand, the caste Hindus do not allow them into their temples, nor do they accept food and water from Kolis. They have to build their houses apart from the caste Hindus. But the latter allow them to fetch water from their wells.

Like all low castes, the Kolis permit widow marriage and divorce. Child marriage is very common in this caste.

Their economic condition is unsatisfactory, as they are depending on domestic and field service and are often unemployed. Nevertheless they often live beyond their income and are generally deeply indebted. They are improvident and spend large sums for weddings and other festivities.¹

In Rajasthan and Gujarat there is a caste of weavers called Meghwal. But they are also employed for skinning dead cattle, for tanning and hewing wood. Nowadays they are mainly landless field labourers. They are an impure caste. Their touch is defiling and they are not allowed to fetch water from the village well. They must live outside the village precincts. Neither the village barber nor the washerman will serve them. They are excluded from the Hindu temples, nor can they take part in orthodox Hindu ceremonies. In the past they were not allowed to wear a turban. They could not even spit on the ground, but had to carry a horn or earthen pot on a string to spit into lest a high-caste man step on their spittle and be defiled. Even their footprints were contaminating and they had to carry behind a broom or leaf branch to obliterate them. High-caste Hindus feared to contract leprosy if they stepped on a Meghwal's footsteps. In Rajasthan even the Muslims treat them as untouchables.

Most of the Meghwals are landless, even in villages in which land was allotted to them. They soon lost it by force or fraud or by their own inability to cultivate their land. Often they were prevented by the high-castes from cultivating the land granted them by Government.²

The weavers in central India are called Balahi. They are quite numerous; in 1961 their number was 338,738 in Madhya Pradesh, while in Rajasthan their number was 282,119.

¹T. S. Katiyar, 1965, 61-4.

²cf. N.N. Vyas and N.D. Choudhary, 1970.

The Balahis weave a coarse type of cloth usually worn only by the poorer and more primitive kind of people. In recent times weaving this type of cloth is no more profitable, and the Balahis have to find other employment, either as field servants, or in towns as labourers, messengers or village watchmen.

In the villages they are supposed to remove all dead animals that are cloven-footed, such as cattle, buffaloes, goats, etc. When such an animal in the village dies, it is the duty of the village watchman to remove the animal and drag it either to a waste place near the village, or to the vicinity of the Balahi quarters where he skins the animal. The skin he may keep, the bones he sells to Muslim collectors who sell them again to the soap factories. Where Balahis still eat the flesh of dead cattle, the members of his family and caste may cut off from the carcasse as much flesh as they desire, take it home and cook it. The skin is sold to the tanners.¹

Concerning the treatment of the Balahis and other low castes by the caste people of the villages, a newspaper report as recent as May 5, 1979 reports that in western Madhya Pradesh (Indore District) Harijans like Chamars and Balahis are denied most of their fundamental rights. They are not permitted to draw water from the public wells. They are refused tea at the local teastalls, and barbers refuse to serve them. They are forbidden to wear good and clean clothes, or ride bicycles. They cannot take out a wedding procession, and the bridegroom is not allowed to ride a horse. They cannot dispose of their dead at the village cremation ground. Anyone trying to violate these caste restrictions is severely punished. In this report is stated that a bridegroom who dared to ride a horse was severely beaten up by the Rajputs of his village and the musical instruments of the band accompanying the wedding procession were badly damaged.

The weavers of Mandla, Raipur and Bilaspur districts call themselves Panka or Panika (36,498 in 1961).^{*} They are probably a subdivision of the Gandas, the large weaving caste of Chhattisgarh and Orissa. But the Pankas do not like to be reminded of this relationship, as they aspire to a higher social rank. Those who live among the Gonds and other aboriginal tribes, have adapted themselves well to the tribal environment. In fact, in the Census of 1961 they are returned as a Scheduled Tribe, not as a Scheduled Caste. But the Gonds treat them as outcastes and do not allow them to enter their houses.

¹S. Fuçhs, 1950.

The Pankas have several sub-sections which are named after the regions where they originally lived or after the occupations which they now follow. Endogamy is not strictly enforced. The sub-divisions are split into exogamous clans named after animals and plants, and many other objects. Totemistic taboos are no longer observed.

The Pankas are generally weavers producing coarse country cloth. Others find employment as village watchmen, field labourers and musicians. They are a quiet and industrious people.

The bulk of the Pankas are at least nominally disciples of Kabir. They are supposed to be strict vegetarians and to abstain from liquor. But many are backsliding and secretly eat meat and drink liquor. Those, however, who are faithful to Kabir's precepts have earned a higher social status though they are still treated as outcastes. The Kabirpanthis worship only Kabir. In their meetings, presided over by a Mahant, they sing hymns in praise of Kabir. After that they break a coconut and distribute its flesh among the attendants.

Like all low castes, the Pankas too permit widow marriage and divorce, though usually only when the wife misbehaves. She is given several warnings before a divorce is put into action. The Pankas bury their dead.

Members of all castes superior to the Pankas are admitted into the caste after a formal ceremony of admission.

The Gandas, or Pans, are the village drudges of Chotanagpur and the Uriya country. They are weavers of coarse cloth, but are also employed as watchmen and musicians. They sing and dance to the accompaniment of their instruments; the dancers generally are two young boys dressed as women.

They are an impure caste and generally live in quarters of their own at one side of the village. They are not permitted to draw water from the village well nor to enter the temples. But they worship the local deities, especially Dulha Deo. They admit outsiders of higher caste into their ranks. In former time, when a high-caste man wanted to give something to a Ganda, he threw it on the ground whence the Ganda had to pick it up. When the Ganda had something to hand to a high-caste man, he placed it on the ground and the high-caste man could take it up from there. The Gandas permit widow marriage and divorce in case of adultery of the wife.

Gandas in the Uriya country were called Patradias or Pans. They were the slaves and menials of the Khond tribe who bought from them the victims (*meriah*) for their human sacrifice which the Khonds used

to perform yearly to increase the fertility of their fields.

There are in central India also several castes of hemp weavers making sackcloth. They are distinct from the cotton weavers. In central India, for instance, we find the Dangurs, who are probably an occupational offshoot of the Kunbi cultivating caste. They themselves claim Rajput descent, but this is not accepted by the higher castes. They readily accept cooked food from the Kunbis, though no Kunbi will eat from the hand of a Dangur. In the past the Dangurs ate pork and drank liquor, and they are generally unclean in their habits, like most low castes.

Another caste of this type is the Kumrawat or Patbina caste. They grow hemp (*san*) and weave sackcloth out of it. They too want to be descendants of the Rajputs, but most probably they are an offshoot of the betelvine-growing caste of Barai. They must have split off from the main stock by taking to hemp growing. Hindus avoid growing hemp. Thus hemp growers and weavers of sacking have a low social status. No caste except the lowest and most debased accept food and water from them.

The Koshtis of Maharashtra, on the other hand, enjoy a much better social status. They live more like the poorer Kunbis, and Brahmins condescend to perform religious ceremonies for them. By weaving machine-made yarn and by using small power-looms they have succeeded in producing a fabric which combines fineness of yarn with the strength and durability of handloom work. They have thus suffered less under the competition of the textile factories. Koshtis are unwilling to work in these factories; they prefer much their handloom work at home though it brings them only a scanty income, and they would earn more as factory workers. But they are in general averse to hard manual work.

The word 'Koshti' is etymologically derived from the word *kosa* or *tesar*, silk. The same caste is called Salewar in Andhra. Sale is obviously derived from the Sanskrit word for weaver—*salika*.

The Koshtis are townspeople and prefer to work for townspeople for whom the usual coarse fabrics of the village weavers would not be good enough. Since they produce cloth of better quality, their social position is also higher. And in order to live up to their higher rank, the Koshtis, in Berar at least, try to observe the Hindu regulations about food and abstain from eating meat. In other regions they still eat meat and fish, and drink liquor, but abstain from beef. A peculiar feature of the Koshtis is that they may not kill cats. If a cat dies in

one of their houses, the owner has to purify his house and give a dinner to his caste fellows in the locality.

Koshtis are said to be of rather revolutionary character and to be often dissatisfied with their economic conditions. They grumble and complain easily and are known to have started several times riots when the grain prices went high.

Handloom weaving is generally in a bad state. It cannot compete with the textile factories. Thus in Jabalpur District, for instance, 14,230 persons were engaged in handloom weaving in 1891. In 1901 their number had decreased to 8,300 and in 1931, out of 510 earners of the Koshti caste only 264, just a little more than half, were engaged in weaving. More recently the indigenous industry got a new lease of life through the installation of power-looms. The various emporiums and shops selling hand-produced articles have also helped in some way to improve the economic condition of the better skilled handloom weavers.

The occupational caste of weavers in Maharashtra is known as Devang. One sub-division of them calls itself Hatkar and claims social precedence over the other two sub-divisions. They probably belonged originally to the Dhangar or shepherd caste. Specialising in the manufacture of coarse blankets out of sheep's wool, they gradually separated from the Dhangar tribe and became Devangs, weavers.

Nowadays the Devangs manufacture a variety of textile fabrics, chiefly saris. But a few have given up their traditional calling and have taken to trade, cultivation, carpentry or masonry work.

An untouchable weaving caste, residing in Gujarat, is called Vankar. It is really a sub-section of the Dher caste. Even today Vankar children are forbidden to touch high-caste children. If by chance they touch high-caste children in school they are punished or turned out of class. If a high-caste man approaches, Vankars must move to the other side of the road and give way to him. They cannot enter a temple. They cannot fetch water from a well used by high castes. They should not wear good quality and clean clothes.

There is a peculiar caste of weavers in Bengal, called Yogi. In 1931 they numbered 384,634. Besides weavers, they are also small traders and farmers. Though suffering like the other weavers from the competition of the textile factories, they have stuck fairly closely to their traditional calling. But they are not really a functional caste. The Yogis are believed to be degraded descendants of former Buddhist monks, and later followers of Goraknath. They still worship the

Buddhist deity Dharma. They have priests of their own caste and observe some unorthodox rites which make them subject to strong Hindu disapproval. They obviously took to weaving to earn their living when their ascetic calling did not bring in enough to live on.

Further south, in Orissa, in Ganjam District, there is a caste of weavers called Pano. They are akin to the Pans north of their region and to the Dombs in Vizagapatam District. They are weavers, basket-makers and field labourers. They are divided into two sections, those living in the Khond hill regions and those living in the plains, among the Hindu castes. The Panos living in the plains are treated as untouchables, and even those in the hills are treated as outcastes by the Khonds. The latter refuse to eat with them and make them build their huts away from their own villages. But the Panos living among the Khonds are their agents, brokers and pedlars. They are largely living on the ignorance and superstition of this aboriginal tribe. In the past the Panos also supplied the victims for the human sacrifice of the Khonds, either from their own caste or outsiders whom they secured by deception or by force. The British found it very difficult to suppress this Khond sacrifice.

The Oriya silk-weaving caste of the Patras, on the other hand, is of much higher social rank. The caste is divided into two occupational sections which neither interdine nor intermarry. One section manufactures silk waist bands, tassels, etc., while the other is engaged in the weaving of silk cloth.

In southern India the social status of the weaving castes is much higher than in north India, though even here there are considerable local differences.

Thus the Tagatas are a Telugu caste of weavers, but they are found also in Kanara. They weave the rougher kind of cloth for the poorer classes; traditionally it is a white cloth with a red border. The origin of the name Togata is unknown. Most probably they once formed one caste with the Devangs, but by assuming the sacred thread and claiming higher descent, they were able to rise in social status, but had to separate from the Devangas. Their social position is fairly good. Their touch defiles only an orthodox Brahmin. They are served by barbers and washermen, and they may draw water from the public well along with the high-caste villagers. Brahmins officiate at their religious ceremonies. They employ genealogists, which is a sign of respectability in those regions.

They have given up alcoholic drinks, but eat meat, though no beef.

They permit widow marriage and divorce in case of adultery.

Another Telugu weaving caste calls itself Sale, or Padma (lotus) Sale. The word derives from the Sanskrit *salika*, a weaver. In Kanara the equivalent is *neyige*.

The Sales are not at all untouchables, some sub-groups even wear the sacred thread. They are supposed to be vegetarians and to abstain from liquor. But they find it difficult to live up to this ideal. Their priests are Satanis.

The Sales weave coarse cotton cloth. Unfortunately most of them do not own their own looms, but work for a pittance for the owners of the looms who exploit them badly. Generally they are heavily in debt.

Kanara has several weaving castes, of various social rank and position. Altogether they bear the name Neyige (weaver). The various weaving castes do not interdine nor intermarry. They are divided by linguistic, religious and social differences, which may pass through each caste and divide it into strictly endogamous sub-sections. Thus the castes may be divided into Kanarese and Telugu speaking groups, religiously into Vaishnavas and Lingayats, and socially into low and slightly higher sections. Most of the castes weave cloth of superior quality, but still they cannot compete with mill-cloth and thus many have been forced to abandon weaving and to take to cultivation or find other employment.

The Devangas are one such caste. They have Kannada and Telugu sub-sections, and Vaishnava and Lingayat branches. They claim a social status superior to the cultivating castes. In the past Brahmins performed their religious ceremonies; now they employ priests of their own caste, as they claim Brahmin status which of course is not admitted them by the high castes. The Canarese sections wear the sacred thread. Some sub-sections allow meat-eating and liquor drinking, permit widow marriage and divorce, at least in cases of adultery. But a guilty woman is forever outcasted.

Many Devangas, though highly skilled weavers, had to abandon their trade for lack of demand for hand-woven products and have adopted cultivation as their main occupation.

The same is true of the Telugu-speaking Devangas, more to the east. There the Devangas play a remarkable part in a religious rite of the Hindu villagers. In Ganjam District the villagers dedicate and let loose so-called Brahmini bulls. When such a bull dies, it is buried with elaborate ceremonies. It is the duty of the Devangas to

carry the dead body of the sacred bull to the burial ground.

The Devangas who are Lingayats have a special veneration for Basavanna, the sacred bull of Shiva.

Another weaving caste of Kanara is that of the Bili Maggas. They hold the rank of a superior Shudra caste and good Brahmins perform religious rites for them. The name Bili Magga signifies a handloom from which white cloth is produced.

The Bili Maggas have two main divisions: one consists of Lingayats, the other of non-Lingayats. They allow widow marriage, but do so with reluctance and permit divorce only in a case of adultery.

The traditional occupation of the Bili Maggas is handloom weaving. But today it is not a flourishing industry and scarcely gives a living to the workers. Some Bili Maggas have shifted to cultivation and other jobs, but they did not take to fishing, for fear of losing caste.

Those among the Bili Maggas who are Lingayats are vegetarians, though the non-Lingayats still eat meat and drink liquor.

The hemp weavers and gunny-bag makers in Kanara are the Gonigas. The name obviously comes from *gona*, the gunny-bag. It is believed that the caste immigrated to Kanara from Andhra. In Kanara their social position is not so low, as they are strict in observing the Hindu food regulations, are vegetarians and abstain from liquor. They forbid widow marriage. In the past the Gonigas were much in the employ of the army for which they manufactured gunny-bags. They still carry on this occupation, but work also as grain transporters, traders and cultivators. Some are in government service.

In Andhra, on the other hand, is a low caste of labourers and cotton weavers, called Mala. They are the Pariahs of Andhra and are regarded as impure. The Malas were in the past zealous partisans of the right-hand sect while the female members of the caste favoured the left-hand sect. The right-hand sect enjoys some privileges over the left-hand section. There are also some theological differences, since the followers of the right-hand sect insist on the two aspects of the deity—male and female, while the followers of the left-hand section emphasise solely the maternal aspect, have a partiality for magic and use sex for magical purposes.

With the Madigas, the Malas (1,550,118 in 1961) are the main untouchable caste of Andhra Pradesh. The word 'Mala' may be a Dravidian word, meaning 'mountain,' which would designate the

Malas as a mountain people. But this etymology is not very probable. An old Telugu dictionary derives Mala from *maila*, dirty. This sounds more appropriate, for the Hindus consider the Malas as ritually impure and filthy in their living habits. In fact, in the eyes of the Hindus they are as low and despicable as the Madigas.

It is said that in pre-British times the Malas were in the service of the Poligars (feudal chiefs) for whom they carried out regular depredations among the villagers. They were obviously a subjugated race, at the mercy of the chiefs, and had to render their services for nothing. But they were given some rent-free land for cultivation in order to sustain themselves. In British time these village servants were partly paid in cash, partly allowed to keep their land. But this gradually passed out of their hands, being mortgaged to landlords and money-lenders, in times of distress. Now most of the Malas are landless field labourers.

They eat beef and drink liquor, often in excess, and are excluded from the Hindu temples. They are not permitted to fetch water from the village well; barbers and washermen do not serve them. But they feel superior to the Madigas and refuse to take water from a Madiga well. They despise the Madigas for eating carrion, though they eat beef themselves.

There is no love lost between the two castes, and each caste watches carefully over the other lest a person take undue advantage over a member of the other caste. The Madigas never allow the Malas to sit in a palanquin or to ride on horseback in a wedding; in retaliation the Malas never wear leather shoes (the Madigas are leather workers). In fact, a Mala would be fined by his caste council if he ever wore leather shoes.

The Malas, like the Madigas, have their living quarters separate from the village proper. In the past they lived outside the village walls traces of which and of the moats around are still visible in many villages. Mala houses are of stone or mud and covered with a thatch of palmyra palm leaves. Their surroundings are often filthy.

Since neither Brahmins nor the village menials want to have any dealings with the Malas, they have their own priests (Dasari), their own barbers and washermen, their own dancing girls (Basavis), their musicians, bards and beggars. The latter are called Mastiga and Pambala (drum people) who earn their living by reciting stories of Ankamma and other deities; they beg and tell fortunes. They also act as musicians at weddings and religious feasts.

The Malas are divided into many sub-divisions, each of which consists of a number of exogamous clans. The clans bear the names of animals, plants and a great variety of inanimate objects.

The Malas are now mainly field labourers. Each Mala labourer prefers to work for a particular landlord and master who, though he exploits him mercilessly, takes care of him when he is in financial and other difficulties. The Malas cannot manage for themselves when in a crisis.

Traditionally the Malas are weavers; they weave a coarse cloth in demand only by the poorer and conservative part of the village population. The weaving implements of the Malas are very primitive. But the Malas do also scavenging work in the villages, carry burdens and dig graves. They also carry the death messages round in the village to the relatives. The Malas dig graves for all castes which bury their dead, except for Muslims, Oddes and Madigas. They also carry the corpses of high-caste people to the cremation ground, provide the fuel and build the pyre.

The Malas are Hindus though recently many have embraced the Christian Faith. The Hindu Malas worship with preference female deities, especially the village goddess and the goddesses of disease. Annually a buffalo sacrifice is performed in their honour. The sacrificer is, however, a Madiga, but the Malas too play an important role in the ritual of the sacrifice.

The Malas celebrate the first menstruation of a daughter with some pomp and a special messenger is sent around to make the event known to all parties concerned, especially to the boy who is her future husband. Child marriage is common among the Malas.

Another Telugu weaving caste is called Karnabattu or Karnabhatu. They are found chiefly in the Godavari region. They weave coarse cloth which is inferior to that manufactured by the Sales. The Karnabattus have a low social status, but are not untouchables as Brahmins perform religious rites for them. They eat meat, even pork, but, on the other hand, forbid widow marriage. Their caste deity is Someshvara.

The Karna Sales are also a Telugu weaving caste, but they are also found in Tamilnad, chiefly in the Madurai and Tanjore districts. They usually weave coarse cotton cloth, but are not averse to weave also silk. They are treated as a caste of low status, but they are not untouchables. They do not employ Brahmins for their religious ceremonies.

The Perikes are a Telugu caste of gunny-bag weavers, corresponding to the Gonigas of Kanara. Gunny-bag is the popular and trading name of the coarse sacking and sacks made from the fibre of jute, much used in Indian trade. The caste is probably an offshoot of the Balija caste. Its members are also employed as carriers and traders of salt, grain and other commodities on bullocks and donkeys.

They claim to be descended from Kshatriyas. At any rate, they are not untouchables.

Another, though much smaller weaving caste in Andhra calls itself Salapu. They are found mainly around Vizagapatam. The name seems to be a corruption of Saluppan, a caste of makers of gunny-bags and coarse cloth. Even to the present day the Salapus weave such cloth. But they do not interdine or intermarry with the Sales. Satani priests perform the religious rites for them.

More important are the Togatas, a Telugu weaving caste, most numerous in Cuddapah District. They eat meat and allow widow marriage.

They have priests of their own caste who all belong to one clan. But they also employ Satani priests, especially for the funeral rites.

The original occupation of the Togatas seems to have been dyeing. But now many Togatas are engaged in farm work.

A large weaving caste in Tamilnad is that of the Kaikolans. They are found all over Tamilnad, but also in the southern parts of Andhra where they speak Telugu. With the Paraiyans they claim descent from a common hero Virabahu. The name Kaikolan is derived from *kai*, hand, and *kol*, which means 'shuttle.' Though of the same stock as the Paraiyans and in the past forced to live in separate hamlets, the Kaikolans have now, by dint of clean living and the employment of Brahmins for their religious ceremonies, risen in social rank.

As weavers they have lost much in the competition with other weaving castes, especially with the Patnukkarans, so that many Kaikolan families have abandoned weaving altogether and are now cultivators, or traders, while the poorer sections of the caste are employed as cart-drivers and coolies.

In the past a girl of every Kaikolan family was dedicated to temple service and prostitution. If the old Devadasi died, a new girl had to be dedicated. But one girl per family was considered sufficient.

Kaikolans play a special role in the worship of the goddess Gangamma. In the annual festival at Tirupati a member of the caste used in the past to pierce his tongue with a wire. At Conjeeveram

members of the caste dragged the chariot of the goddess Kali in procession on cords passed through the muscles of their back.

The Khattris of Tamilnad, also called Patnukkarans, are silk weavers. In manners, customs and language they are much akin to the Patvegars, but do not intermarry with that caste. Both castes still eat together, however. The Khattris seem to be immigrants from Maharashtra, because they speak a dialect of Marathi when among themselves.

The Khattris of Conjeeveram are now traders in silk yarn, silk sashes and dye material. They also deal in human hair.

Khattris wear the sacred thread and regard themselves as a respectable caste. But they permit widow marriage, while a divorced woman can only remarry after the death of her husband.

Attached to the caste are families of beggars who keep the genealogies of the Khatri families up to date. They are called Bhat. The Khattris practise a kind of hypergamy, that is, the superior section takes girls from an inferior one, but does not give its daughters to it.

A caste of weavers further south, in the Tanjore and Madurai districts, is the Koliyan caste. The Koliyans were originally Paraiyans, but do not interdine and intermarry with them anymore. They are engaged in weaving coarse cloth, and supplement their livelihood by field work. Though their original Paraiyan connection is still known, they are not treated as untouchables by the high-castes.

The Patnukkarans, or silk-thread people, on the other hand, claim Brahmanical rank. They were settled originally in Gujarat or Saurashtra so they state, and for some reason migrated to southern India. Their way seems to have led them through Andhra, because some of them still speak Telugu. They claim to be Saurashtra Brahmins, but they are unable to sustain this claim. There exists a Mandasor inscription of 473 AD, but it describes them only as soldiers and weavers. The Tamil Brahmins reject their claim and regard them as a low caste.

But the Patnukkarans support their claim by a strict observance of the Hindu customs and ways of life, practise infant marriage, forbid widow marriage, eat only vegetarian food and wear the sacred thread of the twice-born.

Originally silk weavers, many Patnukkarans are now engaged in ordinary cotton weaving and dyeing, in agriculture and trade. They are an intelligent and enterprising people, with a strong community spirit.

The Salyan caste is another weaving community of Tamilnad, mainly residing around Tanjore. The Salyans seem to have no connection with the Sales of Andhra. They speak Tamil while the Sales even in Tamilnad have retained their Telugu language. The Salyans also enjoy a higher social status; but it is still known that in the past they had priests of their own caste, and high-caste Hindus would not even touch the cloth manufactured by them, but inspected it by means of a stick. And no caste will dine in a Salyan house. Today they wear the sacred thread and employ Brahmins as their priests, and even as cooks. This rise in caste status must be of fairly recent date, it seems.

The Salyans follow closely the customs and ways of behaviour of the Kaikolans. They also have the same social structure and even interdine with them. Some Salyans had to give up the manufacture of fine cloth and now produce coarse cloth for which there is more demand. Some have taken to agriculture or to trade. Others dye yarn.

A caste of cotton weavers in Kerala is that of the Chaliyans. In dress and custom they resemble the other artisan castes of the region. They claim to have belonged to a higher caste when they still lived in Tamilnad, but were degraded by the deception of a minister on their arrival in Kerala. Now they do not wear the sacred thread as their caste fellows in Tamilnad do. Yet, they are by no means untouchables, but a respected artisan caste. They have, however, their own barbers who are also their priests.

They practise ancestor worship, of the local deities they have a decided preference for female deities, especially Gangamma. They are much addicted to the veneration of demons for whom they dance and fall into trance.

It is almost certain that they hail from Tamilnad, as their huts and houses form a street with a closed line of houses which is not usual in Kerala.

Dyers and Cloth Stampers

A small sub-section of the weaving caste, but spread all over India and completely separated from the weavers, is the caste of dyers and cloth stampers. The dyers go under the name Rangrez or Rangari and are mainly Muslims of the Sunni sect. The cloth stampers call themselves Chhipa and are usually Hindus.

The Rangrez too must have been Hindus originally because they have retained many Hindu customs. They form endogamous divisions, after the Hindu fashion. They even employ Brahmins at their

marriages. However, they are more orthodox in the north.

As the dress of men and women in India is still largely traditional, at least in the rural areas, the dyers are not short of employment and produce the colours which are favoured by the different castes and religions. Their dyes are natural, and their principal agents are safflower (*Carthamus tinctorius*), which produces the red colours, turmeric (*haldi*) which gives the yellow colour, while green is made from a mixture of indigo and turmeric, purple from indigo and safflower, orange from turmeric and safflower, almond colour (*badami*) from turmeric and two wild plants (*kachora* and *nagarmothi*), and khaki from myrabolans and filings.

The import of chemical paints has of course done much harm to the traditional dyers, but fortunately many Hindus would fear to lose caste if they dyed their own clothes though no skill is required for this job. Thus the Rangrez have still retained their trade, at least in the rural areas.

Though Mohammedans, the Rangrez are not regarded as socially equals by their co-religionists. Good-class Muslims refuse to inter-dine and intermarry with them. This shows their original low-caste association.

The Chhipas, whose name comes from *chhapna*, to print, use a different method from the Rangrez. They print coloured patterns on cotton cloth with wooden stamps. They use less vivid colours than the Rangrez. But they have a great variety of patterns, though the variety of colours is somewhat restricted. In one shop there might be as many as 300 different stamps.

The Chhipas rank with the lower artisan castes, and Brahmins will not accept water from their hands.

Tailors

As the local names suggest, the tailors have branched off from the caste of cloth printers and dyers. They belong to the urban areas where they are more numerous. They are usually called *darzi*, a Persian word, meaning a 'seam.' The Hindu name for tailor is *Suji*, from *sui*, the needle. The Marathi word however is *Shimpi* or *Chhipa*, printer or dyer, probably, because many of this caste became tailors. In Sikkim and Nepal they go by the names *Damai*, *Domi*, *Daziya*, *Tami*, *Kotdal*, *Nagarchi*, or *Darzi*.

It appears that the origin of the caste is comparatively recent because the use of the needle, and the needle itself, was largely un-

known before the arrival of the Muslims in India. Some historians aver, however, that the Aryans on their arrival in India dressed in sewn garments. But such garments might have been restricted to the royal or at least aristocratic classes.

Nowadays the tailors belong to an occupational caste and obviously are recruited mainly from the weaving castes, for the calico-printers and dyers, from whom the tailors come, are themselves originally a sub-section of the weaving caste. But as some names in the Darzi caste suggest, also Kayasths, Rajputs and Brahmins have taken to tailoring. The modern city tailor shops are of course owned by members of various castes.

While in Europe the tailor is often the butt of ridicule in social life and in folktales, this is not so in India. But his place is taken here by the weaver. Since the Second World War during which cloth became scarce in India, the number of tailor shops have much increased and sewn garments have become much in use. Even in the rural areas men now often wear pants and shirts and if they do not wear a coat, they might at least wear a vest which has to be sewn by a tailor. And though rural women usually wrap themselves into an unsewn sheet of cloth, they at least wear a bodice. But in wide areas of western and northern India women wear petticoats sewn by themselves or by tailors. Unmarried girls wear even in very traditional families a frock.

The tailor is not exactly a village servant, but in the past wealthy landlords used to employ tailors at least seasonally and for special occasions and feasts. The tailor stayed in the house and worked there, was given his meals and a place to sleep at night. For this reason he is counted among the menial castes though he is not an untouchable. His descent from low castes may be another reason for his low menial status in the rural areas. His place is generally below the cultivating castes. Brahmins do not accept water from his hands, though they perform religious ceremonies for him.

In Nepal, however, the tailors (*damai*) are regarded as untouchables as they are at the same time the village drummers.

In the Punjab, on the other hand, where the tailor is equally connected with the calico-printer or dyer, the latter is not connected with the weaver, but with the washerman. Thus Chhimbas (printers and dyers) may at the same time be either washermen or tailors. But other castes too may take up the job of tailoring.

In central India the tailor also forms a sub-section of the Chhipa

or Shimpi, the calico-printer or dyer, but the latter is not connected with the washerman, but with the weaver.

The same is true in Maharashtra. The tailor is called Shimpi (cloth-printer). Here the tailor was needed because Maratha women were ignorant of sewing. When blouses (*choli*) came into fashion for women and coats (*angarkha* or *barabandi*) for men, the tailor became a necessary artisan. From the name it can be concluded that the tailor in Maharashtra and Gujarat was originally a printer of cloth (*chhippi* in Gujarati). But even cloth-printing is a comparatively recent importation; it appears that it was quite new in the early times of the Peshwas.

Nowadays members of other castes also take to tailoring. Attempts have been made to unite all tailors into a common caste, but so far this agitation has failed, because the tailors belonging to higher castes do not want to be associated with those of the Chhipi or Shimpi caste proper.

The same is true in Kanara. Here too the tailor is through the dyer and printer connected with the weaver. His social rank is just below that of the cultivating castes. He claims descent from the Rajputs. Though this claim is not accepted by the higher castes, the tailor is definitely not an untouchable.

In central India as well as in Kanara the tailors form a loose caste union divided into various endogamous sub-sections. The lower sections usually permit widow marriage and divorce, at least in a case of adultery. They also eat meat and drink liquor. But the sub-sections belonging to the higher castes follow more strictly the food and marriage regulations of higher Hindu castes.

In southern India the tailors usually are Hindus. Thus there is such a caste in Tamilnad, called Panan. Their caste status is fairly high. Brahmins and Vellalans act as their priests and they are permitted to visit Hindu temples. But barbers and washermen refuse to accept food prepared by a Panan.

Besides tailoring, the Panans are employed in umbrella-making, and as exorcists and devil worshippers. Their womenfolk practise midwifery.

In Kerala, the same caste has a much lower social status. While in Trivandrum the Panans also do tailoring, in other places they are the barbers of the polluting castes above the Cherumans. They also do umbrella-making and are engaged in all kinds of field-work. In villages they build mud-walls. Their womenfolk practise midwifery.

They are a polluting caste and must keep a distance of 32 ft from Brahmins. Their settlements are at a distance from the villages, near the hamlets of the Ezhavas. They may not enter Hindu temples and must stay outside the walls surrounding the temple grounds. At least this was the rule until the Temple Entrance Bill was promulgated.

Wool and Blanket Weavers

Wool and blanket weaving is performed almost exclusively by shepherd castes and aboriginal tribes. Neither the shepherds nor the tribal people belong to the social groups under consideration here. Though wool and blanket weavers may not belong to the high-castes, they are not and refuse to be at the bottom of the Indian society.

4. The Leather Workers

Indian society has imposed on all leather workers the duty to deal with dead cattle. Some sections—and these are the lowest—skin and remove the carcasses from the village. Even among these sections there are grades: Some touch no bodies but those of the cloven-footed animals; others draw the line at cattle and leave sheep and goats to their inferiors. Usually the hide becomes the property of the skinner and he may also cut off a portion of the animal's flesh if in his section he is not forbidden to eat carrion. Indeed, when the market for skins is brisk, or in revenge for a slight or injustice, mortality among the cattle is apt to rise materially, and the suspicion is frequently voiced that this is due to poisoning.

But though various impure castes remove the hides and not only leather workers, as for instance the Balahis in central India and the Mahars and Mangs in Maharashtra, it is left to special castes to tan or curry them. These castes are, except perhaps in the north, generally split off into separate sections which occupy the lowest social rank. Slightly higher are the castes which supply the leather work required for the cart, plough or water-lift, while the shoe-maker is still higher in rank among the leather workers. But on top is, or was, the saddle maker. Not seldom he tries to sever all connection with the leather-working caste group and join the more respectable artisan group. The book-binders, painters and sculptors have practically succeeded in this complete disconnection. Other leather-working sections have changed over to weaving, like the Julahas, or to farming.

In many villages the leather workers cannot keep exclusively to their

avocation; they are forced to seek employment as field labourers. Usually they work only as occasional labourers, at the bidding of the farmers and glad when they can get any kind of employment. They have to live in hamlets of their own separated from the village of the caste Hindus, and are treated as untouchables.

It is interesting to observe that the leather workers are all over northern India closely connected with the weavers. In some regions the leather workers have taken up weaving. Both castes act as watchmen, skimmers of cattle and field labourers. And both castes hold cultivation as the highest occupation they can aspire at. And it is their highest desire in life to possess a plot of land and to cultivate it. But once they have attained this ambition and acquired land, they often seem unable to manage it properly. On the whole, their fields in a village are the worst cultivated and least productive. They lack the necessary stamina for hard work and also, as it seems, the mental ability for planning and managing a farm. They have for centuries served as menials and slaves, now they are incapable suddenly to act as masters and to work on their own without being forced to work.

The leather workers have always and everywhere freely admitted outsiders of higher caste into their ranks. Some came in small groups, like the Kalyans who were originally Bohras, and the Koris and Kols. Other cases of affiliation are suggested by such names as Kor-Chamars (weavers turned tanners), Chamar-Julahas (leather workers turned weavers), and Chamar-Koris. In Gorakhpur there are no Koris, only Kori-Chamars. The Karwals, a vagrant tribe, are found also as a sub-caste among the Chamars. The Darzis (tailors), the Banjaras, the Barhais (carpenters) and the Sonars (goldsmiths) each have a Chamar sub-caste. The Kayasth-Mochis who make saddles and harnesses, claim to be of Kayasth origin and state that the term 'Mochi' refers merely to their present trade.

The leather workers have a fairly efficient caste organisation which watches over the observance of the caste rules and regulations though on the whole they are rather tolerant and loose. Sexual morality is generally high only among those groups that aspire for a higher social status; they also observe the Hindu food taboos more carefully, while the lowest sub-sections of this caste eat not only beef and pork, but also carrion. Often their loyalty to their master and landlord is stronger than that for their own caste fellows. Especially those who are field labourers and village servants are necessarily attached to the masters they serve, while those who are artisans and thus economically

more independent observe the caste regulations more faithfully. They have a caste headman with a council of elders in every larger caste community, and a higher authority supervising the caste members of a larger circle, of caste communities living in either six or ten or even more villages.

(a) *Tanners and Leather Workers in General*

In Jammu and Kashmir the carcasses of cattle are removed and skinned by a caste called Batal. They also cure skins. Socially they are very low and impure, and even Mohammedans avoid their society though they have embraced Islam. The Batals are talented musicians and dancers, and most of the common dancing girls belong to this caste.

In the Himalayan mountains the leather work as well as the weaving are done by the impure Kolis or Daghis. *Dagh* means cattle, and the word Daghi indicates that this caste drag away the dead cattle and also eat its flesh. A Koli may refuse to do this, but a Daghi is always associated with dead cattle. Wealthy Kolis often refuse to skin dead cattle and look down on those who do it, and call them Daghis.

The Kolis as well as the Daghis are treated as impure by the higher castes of the hills. They live in separate hamlets and are not allowed to enter the houses of the high castes. There is no interdining with them. Though they are the village musicians, they are not permitted to play music and to drum in religious processions; this is done by the local *smiths*.

In Kangra leather work is done by the Chanals. Their connection with the Kolis is not clear. The Chanals refuse to touch dead cattle and do not interdine and associate with those that do.

In Spiti, on the other hand, leather work is not considered impure and degrading. There it is a veritable home industry and the Spitians make excellent boots and saddlery.

In the Punjab the tanner and leather worker is called Chamar. He is mostly a Hindu while the Muslim Chamars call themselves Mochis. The name Chamar is derived from the Sanskrit word *Charmakara* or 'worker in hides'. But in the Punjab he is far more than a leather worker. He is the general servant and field worker in the villages; he does all the work requested from him by the high castes, often without getting payment, or such work as cutting grass, carrying wood and bundles, acting as watchman and the like; he plasters the houses with mud or white-washes them when they need it. The Chamar takes

the hides of all dead cattle and the flesh of all cloven-footed animals, leaving the others to the Chuhras. He makes and mends shoes, thongs for the cart, and whips and other leather work; and above all he does an immense deal of hard work in the fields, each family supplying a particular landlord with the continuous labour of a certain number of hands. All this the Chamar does as a village menial, receiving fixed customary dues in the shape of a share in the produce of the fields. In the east of the Punjab the village Chamars also do a great deal of weaving which however is paid for separately.

While the Chamars serve the landlords in their capacity as attached labourers, they serve a wider section of the village population by removing the carcasses of the dead cattle, making shoes out of the tanned hide, and herding the cattle. If there is a tannery in the village, a few Chamars or members of a tanning sub-section are engaged in tanning and shoe-making. The shoe-maker is required to give a pair of shoes to the owner of the dead animal, but he is allowed to keep the rest of the hide. A few Chamars are also the cowherds of the village, and they are paid by the heads of the households on the basis of the number of cattle entrusted to their care. In some places they also make and mend the leather buckets used in lifting water for irrigation.

The Chamars stand above the Chuhras in social rank, but they still belong to the impure castes and may not enter the temples nor the houses of the high castes.

The number of Chamars is very great and they are spread over the whole of northern India. Their number is, according to the Census of India 1961, as high as 16,230,491. Their strongest concentration is in Uttar Pradesh where as many as 8,194,154 Chamars can be found. But Bihar, Punjab, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh also have each more than a million Chamars.

While the majority of the Chamars are Hindus, a considerable part of them have become either Muslims or Sikhs. The change of religion has somewhat influenced their social status though by far not as much as they have expected and hoped. For neither the Sikhs nor the Muslims have completely and unreservedly accepted them into their folds. The stain of impurity could not be removed from them even after their conversion. One reason for this is that the conversion of the Chamars was never total and radical; the converted Chamars did not radically change their ways of life. Then, the Hindus did not change their attitude towards the converted Chamars, but continued

to treat them as outcastes and untouchables, and thus the Sikhs and Muslims too could not accept them as their equals, for then they themselves might lose their high social status in the estimation of the Hindus. Finally, the Sikhs and Muslims, though their religions preach the equality and brotherhood of all the faithful, are themselves too much influenced by the Hindu caste system to accept fully this teaching of their creeds.

The Sikh Chamars also call themselves Ramdasia. They have accepted Ram Das as their religious leader (*guru*). They have abandoned leather work for the loom; they do not eat carrion and indeed enjoy a higher position than the Hindu Chamars. But the Sikhs still treat them with discrimination and have never fully admitted them into the brotherhood.

The Muslim Chamars call themselves Mochi; but they have not changed their ways of life nor their calling. Thus their social status has only slightly improved for the better. The Mohammedan Chamars have not been admitted into full religious and social communion with the other Muslims.

Other Chamar sub-divisions, Hindu by religion, are the Chandars who claim the highest rank among the Punjabi Chamars. They refuse to do tanning and do not intermarry and interdine with Chamars who are engaged in tanning skins.

Another tanning and leather working caste in the Punjab is that of the Khatiks who in their majority are Muslims by religion. They seem to be an offshoot of the Pasis, the toddy tappers of eastern North India. Like the Pasis they rear pigs and poultry. Their habitat is in the Jumna region, in Patiala and Sirsa districts. The Khatiks tan only sheep and goat skins; for tanning they use only salt and the juice of the *madar* (*Calotropis procera*), and no lime, while the Chamars for the tanning of buffalo and ox hides use also lime. They also dye leather, which the Chamars will not do.

Still, they hold a social position lower than the Chamars, probably because they rear pigs. The Khatiks are also butchers, but they slaughter only goats and sheep.

Another caste of similar occupation is that of the Chamrangs, who are tanners, but work in cattle and buffalo hides only. They do not work up the leather which they tan. One section of this caste which rears pigs is for this reason separated from the Chamrangs who object to this practice.

The endogamous Bagris and Desis are now residents of Patiala. As

the name indicates, the Bagris come originally from Bagar, while the Desis are split into two sections, the Chamars who make shoes, and the Bonas who weave blankets, since they have become Sikhs.

The Dhers in the Punjab are a sub-caste of the Chamars, while in Gujarat and in central India they form a separate caste. The obvious reason is that in the Punjab they perform all the jobs which are the usual occupations of the Chamars.

The Buniyas and Ruhtiyas, other sub-divisions of the Chamars, have after their conversion to the Sikh religion abandoned leather work and taken to weaving.

The Bilais of the Punjab are grooms and village messengers, while in the central Doab they work as weavers and casual labourers.

The leather workers of northern India generally belong to the Chamar caste. The Chamars are, even in present time, forced to lead a life of humiliation and social degradation. The high castes do not accept water from them. If they offer them water, they do not pour it into their vessels, but only into the Chamar's cupped hands. Milk from the Chamar's goats is accepted by the high castes only if a high-caste man has milked the goats. A Chamar is not permitted to touch the utensils or the person of a high-caste man. Even his shadow pollutes a member of the high-castes. He should not pass through the streets in which the high-castes dwell.

The power that wealth and position give enables the high castes to meddle in the every-day affairs of the Chamars, and turns the helpless situation of these people to their own advantage. Thus the high castes, especially the landlords, are often high-handed in their treatment of the Chamars who cannot retaliate. To a certain extent the Chamars are themselves to be blamed for this state of things. Their rules and regulations concerning morality and good behaviour are rather liberal, and thus they often find themselves in troubled waters. Traditional custom permits influential high-caste villagers to interfere in the affairs of the Chamars in cases of illegal sexual intimacy, elopement, divorce, etc. Thus the Chamars fall an easy prey to the greedy clutches of the upper caste members. Further, in the Chamar caste there is much lack of solidarity, and hence lack of strength to resist the exploitation by the high castes.

Once a Chamar becomes indebted to a landlord, it is well nigh impossible for him to disentangle himself from his financial troubles for, as if by magic, the sum borrowed never decreases, even though the debtor pays off large amounts of his debt. The rate of interest is

very high, and often enough accounts are falsified. The Chamar is generally illiterate and cannot check the accounts, and even if he could, he cannot stand up against his landlord.

In the past the high castes claimed the right to free service by the Chamars (*begar*). It was left to their goodwill to pay wages for such services or not. Nowadays the Chamars have begun to resist such demands. Some Chamars are aware of the fact that Government has fixed a minimum wage for their labour. If the landlords are unwilling to pay the full amount, the Chamars might refuse to work, especially during the sowing and harvest season. The landlords of course retaliate and not seldom atrocities are committed in the villages.

In some villages the Chamars have become aware of their numbers and political power if they were united. They want to be liberated from their social degradation and economic exploitation. Unfortunately the way by which they plan to achieve this appears to be the wrong one. They want to narrow their social distance from the higher castes by adopting exactly the same discriminatory measures against castes which they regard as their inferiors. Thus, in order to raise their own social status, the Chamars have begun in some villages to refuse to take food and water from the Dhobis and the Bhaksors. They now treat these castes as untouchables and refuse to have any friendly social dealings with them. They did not succeed so far with the Dhobis who claim to be superior to the Chamars, but with the Bhaksors they had more luck. Also in matters of dress the Chamars want to imitate the higher castes. For in the past they were not permitted to wear a loincloth below the knee, nor shirts, caps, shoes and umbrellas. Chamar women could not wear a *sari*, only a skirt and blouse. Gold ornaments were also prohibited, as also the nose-ring. They may, of course, not use the common village well nor enter the village temple or take part in a sacrifice. Chamars now claim a temple exclusively for themselves and also a separate well to which no other caste should have access, and in particular no members of a caste inferior to theirs.

Though the caste system is regarded as a divine institution, its hold on the village population has weakened through the abolition of the zamindari system. Now those who had only been tenants of a field have become its owners and have been liberated from utter dependence on the former landlords. With land and money at their command, the low castes can now turn a deaf ear to the orders of the high castes. They cannot be evicted anymore. Of course, the land-

owning higher castes often take the law into their own hands, but this is no more so easy as in past times.

It is alleged that the leather workers of northern India, the Chamars, are divided into over a thousand sub-sections. Among all these sections two great sub-sections predominate: the Jatiyas and the Jaiswars. The Jatiyas represent about twenty percent of the whole Chamar population. They are found almost entirely in the north and west of Uttar Pradesh, mainly in the Meerut, Agra and Rohilkhand Divisions. The Jaiswars, on the other hand, number over a million and are found chiefly in the Allahabad, Benares, Gorakhpur and Fyzabad Divisions.

These two sub-castes make up nearly two-fifths of the whole Chamar population. Each of them claims to be superior in rank to the other; it seems that the Jatiyas are usually victorious in this competition. Both sections have many wealthy members. Wherever possible they do farm work and fight shy of the degrading work of their traditional calling; but where they are too numerous they are forced to accept degrading work and to revert to the polluting habits of their caste.

The Jatiyas, or Jatuas, earn today their livelihood as field labourers, cultivators, dealers in hides and makers of shoes. Some of the cultivating sections of this caste do not make leather and do not allow their women to practise midwifery. Some of the shoe-making sections refuse to mend shoes. In some places, especially in the Punjab, the Jatiyas work in horse and camel hides, and refuse to touch the skins of cattle. Some of the dealers in hides are quite wealthy and live as comfortably as any high-caste Hindus. About one half of the sub-caste, however, still eat carrion. Some draw the line at beef or pork.

Various suggestions have been made regarding their origin. Some say that the Jatiyas were originally camel drivers, as their name *jat* indicates. Others connect them with the Jat caste and claim that they are the offspring of a mixed union of Jats and Chamars. It was also suggested that they are the occupational offshoot of the Yadu tribe from which Krishna came. Although the Jatiyas of the Punjab work in camel and horse hides, Gaur Brahmins condescend to officiate in their religious ceremonies. For this reason alone they may be considered as the highest sub-caste of the Chamars.

In and around Agra the Jatiyas or Jatavs—as they call themselves there—have under the leadership of their 'big men' (mostly owners of

small shoe factories) tried to raise their status by imitating high-caste customs, claiming to be Kshatriyas and agitating for separate listing in the Census. They abandoned this strategy rather suddenly just before independence, joined Dr. Ambedkar's Scheduled Caste Federation (later the Republican Party), rejected caste, and eventually followed Dr. Ambedkar into the semi-political form of Buddhism.

The Jatavs now exploit their status of Untouchability (as 'Hindus') and take advantage of the protective discrimination written into the Constitution. At other times, they emphasise their status as citizens (i.e., as Buddhists) demanding social equality.¹

While in Uttar Pradesh and especially in Agra the Jatiyas form the most advanced and socially highest section of the Chamars, the Jatiyas of Rajasthan do not rank higher than the other Chamars. They suffer all the disabilities of that caste. They also remove dead cattle from the village precincts and even eat the flesh of cattle which died of old age or disease.

Subsidiary occupations of the Jatiyas in Rajasthan are mending shoes, twisting ropes and field labour. Few Jatiyas possess fields. They permit widow marriage and divorce.

The Jaiswars are found in strong concentration in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. From their ranks many menial servants and house servants are recruited in the towns and cities. Many are grass cutters and grooms; indeed many of the grooms (*sais*) from Calcutta to Peshawar in British times were Jaiswars of Jaunpur and Azamgarh. Some of this sub-caste are tanners, others make shoes, and many are casual labourers. It is said that some Jaiswars were with the troops that fought with Clive at Plassey. They worship the halter as their bread-giver, and consider it an act of sacrilege to tie up a dog with it, because the dog is unclean. For the most part they eat carrion and pork though their leading men do not. In some places Jaiswar women practise midwifery.

Other, less important sub-divisions of the Chamar caste are the following: the Chamar Chamars, found in great concentration in the Meerut and Rohilkhand Divisions, are counted among the lowest of all Chamar sub-castes. They are tanners, which accounts for their low rank. But there are also cultivators among them, as also shoe-makers. Their women practise midwifery. They eat pork.

The Dohars are a numerous sub-section of the Chamars, found in

¹cl. M. Holmstrom, 1971, 145-6.

an area running right across Uttar Pradesh. They are most concentrated in the Hardoi District where they form more than half of the Chamar population. Though they do not rear pigs, they are not averse to eating pork.

The Kurils are found chiefly in the Allahabad and Lucknow Divisions. They claim to have been brought to Lucknow from Fatehpur Haswa several generations ago. They are leather workers and field labourers, keep pigs and eat carrion. But they will not touch dead camels and horses. The Kurils who live to the west of the Ganges have no social contact with those on the other side of the river. Nor do the two sections intermarry. The women of the western section wear skirts while those of the eastern section wear loin-cloths (*dhoti*).

The Kori or Koli Chamars are found almost exclusively in the Gorakhpur and Lucknow Divisions. They are shoe-makers, field labourers, grooms and weavers. They will not touch dead camels or horses. In the Punjab, where they do not work in leather nor perform menial tasks, they are called Chamar-Julahas, i.e., Chamar weavers. The Koris (weavers) often live alongside of them, and were probably formerly also Chamars. In some places people still remember when the Koris and the Kori Chamars were one caste and intermarried. In Mirzapur the Koris are known as Chamar-Koris.

The Aharwars are found chiefly in Bundelkhand, where in some districts they form about 90 percent of the Chamar population. In some places they do not tan leather nor do their wives practise midwifery. Many Aharwars are farmers, and some are petty contractors.

The Dhusiyas or Jhusias are the main Chamar sub-section in the Benares Division and in the adjoining district of Gorakhpur. Although they are shoe and harness makers by vocation, by necessity most of them are daily field labourers. Many are also engaged as house servants. Only a few own fields. Some of the sub-caste are tanners, sometimes they serve as musicians. In the east, in Bihar, they keep pigs and fowls. Their women practise midwifery. In the Punjab they are regarded as a sub-division of the Mochis.

The Chamkatiyas inhabit the Bareilly District, where nearly 80 percent of the sub-caste are residing. It is said that from this sub-caste both Nona Chamari (a deified witch) and Rai Das (disciple of Ramanda) came.

The Dosadhs or Dusadhs, residents of the Lucknow and Gorakhpur

pur Divisions and of the Lower Doab, are weavers, grooms and field labourers. They keep pigs. In Bengal the Dosadhs repudiate any connection with the Chamars or weavers. They no longer work in leather nor do they eat carrion. They do not allow their womenfolk to practise midwifery. Many of them work as house-servants. But in other regions the Dosadhs still keep on good terms with the Chamars and live next to them in the villages. Now many Dosadhs go to the cities and work in the factories.

Another section that is often called a sub-caste is that of the Rai Dasis. But in some regions all Chamars are called Rai Dasis because the followers of this sect are mainly found in the Chamar caste. Rai Das has followers all over north India.

On the other hand, the Satnamis, a religious sect in Madhya Pradesh, have become practically a new sub-caste. The Satnamis who make up the largest and oldest Chamar group in Chhattisgarh Division, have completely abandoned all leather work and have taken to farming. Most of them have become the owners of the land they cultivate.

The Alakhgirs, a section formed by Lalgir, have also become an independent endogamous sub-section.

It is impossible to mention all Chamar sub-sections. It may suffice to mention just a few: The Mangatiyas are beggars who accept alms from the Jaiswars only. Once a year they make their rounds, taking a coin and a bread from each house. The Chandaurs make, but do not mend shoes, and sew canvas and coarse cloth. The Nona Chamars live in the neighbourhood of Kanpur. The Dhengars and the Nikhars are residents of the Etawah District. The former serve as grooms, but the latter do not. Their wives refuse to act as midwives. The Sakarwars are tanners, shoe-makers and cultivators. They keep pigs. The Karols are a small section of shoe-makers and live mainly in the Bahrein, Bulandshahr and Benares districts. Other sub-sections are the Dhumans, Domars, Raj, Kumaris, Nigatis, Dhingariyas, Ghorcharhas and Pachhwahans.

At the other extreme of the social scale are the Dohars, who are grass cutters and occasional labourers. The Sohas, a very small group of leather workers, seem to be of tribal origin.

Other minor sub-castes are the Goles of Etawah, the Dolidhauwas of Partabgarh, who are or were palanquin bearers, the Dhunyal-Julahas who weave cloth, the Lashkariyas who make shoes, often of modern design, and the Gharamis of Dehra Dun who are thatchers.

The Raj or Raj-Mistris, who can be found everywhere in Uttar Pradesh, are a purely occupational caste of masons and brick-layers, but are largely recruited from the Chamar caste. This caste is of comparatively recent origin. The Chains, who in some areas, as for instance in Ballia, are rated as Chamars, consider themselves an independent caste. They are described as criminals, thieves, swindlers, imposters and pick-pockets. If they are Chamars, they would be the criminal stratum of this caste. They are treated as a criminal caste and are under constant police supervision. The Dhanuks too are sometimes classed as Chamars. They eat carrion and the leavings of food from other castes, and their women act as midwives.

There are a number of other small castes that also work in leather. The Dafalis make the drums called *tabla* and *tasa*, and the Bhands or jesters, make the *damka* drum. The Dhors make buckets and dye leather; the Kalans cobble shoes and make tents; the Dabgars, residents of the Punjab, of eastern Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, make large raw-hide vessels, beaten raw camel's hide bottles for *ghee* and oil, and also drum heads, leather sheaths for swords and shields; the Dhalgars make leather shields, while the Chakkiliyans, the Doms of the hill tracts, and the Korals are also leather workers. The water carriers (Bhish:) who are sometimes Chamars also work in leather. The Chiks or Chikwas are Muslims who turn out goat and sheep skins.

In Rajasthan the Chamars proper are traditionally engaged in leather work of all kinds, but they refuse the skinning of dead animals and the tanning of hides as polluting occupations. All this they leave to the Bolas. There is no caste in India so low that it does not find another one that in their own eyes is still inferior. The Chamars by necessity accept all kinds of jobs, but the higher castes do not allow them any but the lowest services. They will not tolerate a Chamar in a position in which he could give orders to a high-caste man. The Chamars, on the other hand, have the same mentality and refuse any type of work that is below their social status. They refuse sweeper work, and would be outcasted if they did such work.

The caste Hindus treat the Chamars as untouchables. In Rajasthan they cannot draw water from the village well, nor may they enter a temple or associate with caste Hindus at their meetings. They may not sit down in a house of a caste Hindu. Though this strict seclusion is gradually giving way, the villages of Rajasthan are slow in following the lead given in other parts of India.

The economic condition of the Rajasthan Chamars too is very unsatisfactory, as they get only the menial jobs which are generally poorly paid in India. Illiteracy, conservatism, lethargy, undernourishment, improvidence and exploitation are the main factors for their poverty and degradation.

One section of the Chamars, though, enjoys a better social status in Rajasthan; they are called Bharatpuria Chamars. They claim that originally they belonged to the Mina tribe. Their main occupations are fieldwork and house building; they refuse to have anything to do with leather work, though in the past they must have been doing this type of work. Discrimination against the Bharatpuria Chamars is much relaxed. Brahmins serve them in religious functions; they can draw water from the village well and enter temples, though no caste Hindu will accept water or cooked food from their hands.¹

In Rajasthan, certain Chamar families have succeeded in raising their caste status by becoming religious. The Bairagis and Jogis form now separate castes. They are really elevated Chamars whose ancestors abandoned their traditional leather work in favour of religious devotion which helped to remove the stigma of untouchability. Now these families are classified as Kamins (Shudras, an artisan caste). They are still not satisfied and want to rise higher in rank by acquiring fields, getting education and clean and lucrative occupations.² Both castes, now endogamous, are still very low in the caste hierarchy, but no more untouchables. Some members of the caste succeeded in acquiring land when the Muslims left for Pakistan. As soon as they got land, they gave up shoe-making and adopted high-caste practices: vegetarianism, ritual cleanliness, religiosity, self-respect, etc. The higher castes resent this, but they feel that they are powerless in keeping these Chamars down.

In central India the greatest concentration of Chamars is in the Chhattisgarh Division. Here we find pure Chamar villages; even the landlords in them are Chamars. Seventy percent of these Chamars, in particular the Satnamis who form the most important sub-section in this region, have abandoned all work in leather and are cultivators. The Satnamis are very anxious to rise in social status and resent bitterly the harsh treatment they have received so far by the higher Hindu castes.

¹S.T. Katyar, 1965, 91-3.

²P.C. Aggarwal, 1973, 77, 83.

But there are also the Paikahas as a distinct Chamar section, the Kanaujiyas and Aharwas who are tanners and leather workers and who make shoes in the traditional fashion. These Chamar sub-sections have taken over the former tasks of the converted Satnami Chamars. The Aharwas claim to be descendants of Rai Das. The Kanaujiyas rear pigs and eat pork. In Raipur the Kochias have become cattle traders.

In central India many Chamar sections bear territorial names which indicate their original homes. The names of other sections signify their specific occupations, as for instance that of the Budalgars who in earlier times made leather bags (*budla*), the Daijaniyas whose wives acted as midwives, the Katuas or leather cutters, the Gobardhuas who were used to collect the droppings of cattle on the threshing floors and wash out and eat the undigested grains, the Mochis or shoe-makers, the Jingars or saddle makers and the Jildgars or book-binders.

As in central India, in Maharashtra too there are seven main divisions of leather workers, some of whom are dyers of skins, others working on sheep skins only. Another section does the tanning. Some manufacture leather tents, another section leather buckets. The Chambhar section manufactures shoes and water-buckets from leather. Some of these sections are lower than the Mahars, some higher. In some parts of Maharashtra the Chamars have managed to rise in the caste hierarchy and to become a low Shudra caste. Brahmins serve at their religious feasts. Some Chamars have become even teachers, clerks in government offices, policemen or soldiers.

The Katais repair shoes and make tents, while the Daphgar make leather-bottles. Both these sub-castes are very low as they eat carrion.

An interesting section of the Chamars are the Dehors in Berar. They work in leather like the Chamars and Mochis. But they have a strong ambition to improve their social position. Thus they strictly abstain from killing any animals, and rigidly enforce child-marriage. Yet they do not observe all Hindu caste rules and prohibitions, as they allow widow marriage and divorce for both husband and wife. On Dasehra they worship their skinning knife and the needle for sewing shoes, the main tools of their trade. Unfortunately, the Dehors could not attain their ambition: Hindus still regard them as impure and bar them from entering the temples. Village barbers and washermen refuse to serve them.

Another superior Chamar section in Berar is that of the Romya or Haralya. The Mangias and the Nona Chamars, on the other hand, are beggars by profession.

A caste of leather workers allied to the Chamars are the Dhors. *Dhor* means 'cattle', and the Dhors are the tanners of cattle skins. They are divided into five endogamous sections which perform different jobs. While one section manufactures leather-buckets, another specialises in drums and makes other leather articles as well, a third section might make or repair shoes, or stain hides.

The Dhors differ from the Chamars and do not intermarry with them. But otherwise there is little difference between the two castes. Socially the Dhors are somewhat lower in rank. Like the Chamars, or Chambhars, as they are called in Maharashtra, the Dhors permit widow marriage and divorce. They worship the local Hindu gods and call themselves Saivites. A Gosavi officiates as their priest, and they pay him an annual fee in cash or clothes.

The skinners and tanners of Gujarat are called Kalpas, while the Mochis make shoes and other leather articles. Their social status is as low as in Maharashtra.

There is a caste of traditional leather workers in Orissa, called Jaggali. They are found mainly in the Ganjam District. Many of them are now engaged in cultivation and various other kinds of labour. They also work as grooms; others sell firewood which they collect. Some are village watchmen.

They permit widow marriage and divorce. Brahmins refuse to serve them, thus they invite Satani priests for their religious feasts. They eat beef and pork, and are addicted to alcoholic drinks. They are probably Madigas who have migrated from Andhra to Ganjam District.

The leather workers of Andhra and Kanara are the Madigas. The origin of the caste name is obscure. They are forced to live on the outskirts of the villages. Their occupations and their living habits make their quarters the filthiest places in the village. They are generally very coarse and rude, quarrelsome, eaters of impure food, and heavy drinkers.

They work as tanners and leather workers, serve as menials and in the past could be ordered by any caste man to work for him free of charge, and they were supposed to sweep the streets of the village and remove all dead animals from the village. Many Madigas were practically slaves and serfs and were attached to one master whom

they served through generations; the master, on the other hand, took care of them whenever they got into any sort of trouble. For their services they received their wages in kind at harvest time. Most Madigas do field service. Some of them are musicians and beat the drums at festivals. In some parts of Andhra Madigas are employed as the official village watchmen and are entitled to a certain portion of the harvest or receive a small plot of land which they can cultivate.

Madigas are Hindus, but may not enter a Hindu temple, nor are Brahmins ready to serve as their priests. They have priests of their own who conduct all ceremonies for them. Famous are their buffalo sacrifices which they perform in honour of Mariamma, the mother goddess and goddess of epidemics. In this sacrifice they play the main part. This sacrifice is supposed to ensure the fertility and protection of the village community. This buffalo sacrifice is surrounded with a rich ceremonial.

One of the daughters in each family, usually the eldest, was in the past dedicated to temple service and prostitution. But even married women and widows could without dishonour dedicate themselves as Basavis.

The Madigas are the lowest caste in Andhra and Kanara. They are not allowed to use public wells or enter a temple. Barbers and washermen do not serve them. Even Holeyas look down on them. In the past they had to keep a distance of twenty paces from Brahmins. On the other hand, they did not allow Brahmins to enter their quarters and feared that such a visit would bring misfortune on them. After chasing a Brahmin who ventured into their streets away, the Madigas used to purify the spot where he had stood with water in which cowdung had been diluted.

The Madigas are ruled by their own caste council which keeps them in fairly strict control. Many Madigas have embraced the Christian Faith in the hope of improving their social status. Their hopes have not been fulfilled so far.

Though by tradition workers in leather, hardly one in twenty of the actual workers follows the occupation now. About one third are cultivators and four ninths subsist on agricultural and other labour. A few are village servants and musicians. They speak Canarese or Telugu according to the locality they live in. The Telugu section does not interdine or intermarry with the Canarese section. Each of these sub-divisions is split into three endogamous communities.

There are besides two other sections worthy of note. One is called Jambava and the other Dakkalu. The Dakkalus, though the hereditary priests of the Madigas, are at the same time their bondsmen (Halemakkalu) and are treated by them as outcastes. They have no fixed residence, but keep wandering from place to place living on the alms of their caste fellows. They administer to their ritual and religious needs. But they live apart. When in a village, they erect their improvised huts a little away from the Madiga quarters. They accept food from no other caste than the Madigas. Food even from Brahmins they refuse unless it has gone through the hands of a Madiga first.

The members of the Jambava section provide the religious guides (*guru*) for the Madigas. They have exclusive monasteries (*math*) for themselves, and affix the title of Muni to their personal name. They wear a *lingam* (emblem of Shiva) and mark their foreheads with ashes and sandal paste. While on their periodical visits to their disciples they lodge either in groves close to the Madiga quarters or occupy a house specially vacated and cleaned for them. They consider Panchalas (goldsmiths) as their special patrons and accept presents from them standing outside their houses whenever they visit villages inhabited by them.

The Jambavas may marry girls from the ordinary Madiga families after subjecting them to some purificatory ceremony, but on no account give their daughters in marriage to other Madigas. The Jambavas in the region claim to be immigrants from the Cuddapah District. They speak Telugu and their women follow the Kudipaita custom, i. e., they wear the loose end of their upper garment over the right shoulder, while the other Madiga women let it fall over the left shoulder.

The exact connection of Jambavas and Madigas generally to the Lingayat religion is evident from the fact that the Jambavas, their *gurus*, wear the *lingam*. The Madigas also worship Arulappa said to be a contemporary of Basava, the founder of the cult, as their patron saint.

The various sub-divisions have, besides, numerous exogamous clans named after animals, plants, trees and various inanimate objects. Several of them seem to be totems, and occasionally they are venerated by the members of the clan concerned.

Infant marriage is held in high esteem though there is no bar against adult marriage. The bride-price is low. Polygamy is practised. Widow marriage is permitted. Divorce is easy.

The dead are usually buried. Madigas freely admit members of all other castes except the Holeyas into their caste after the usual purification ceremony.

In religion, they are worshippers of village deities such as Mariamma, Morasamma and Matangamma, the caste goddesses. Temples dedicated to Mariamma are to be found in almost every Madiga hamlet. They have priests of their own called Tappatiga. Once a Tappatiga is initiated as ordained sacrificer (*pujari*) he cannot carry on the usual caste occupation. But some Madigas profess the Vaishnava religion and as such are called Dasayyas or Dasas. They also forthwith cease to exercise their customary occupation. All Vaishnava Madigas invite them to officiate at their feasts.

The Madigas have a begging section, the Machalas, attached to their caste. They are invited during weddings at which they receive certain prescribed fees. The Madigas are a caste well organised under Kattamanes, each with a Dodda Yajaman at its head. He is assisted by a deputy, the Chikka Yajaman. Under him is the Kolkar, the beadle who summons the caste members whenever necessary.

The Madigas, both male and female, drink hard and eat most kinds of animal food except monkeys, snakes, etc. The usual caste titles are Ayya, Appa and Gauda.

Another caste of leather workers in Kanara are the Chumas. The Mochis or shoe-makers do not intermarry with them. The Chumas skin dead animals, and do rough leather work. They manufacture ropes of green leather, all the leather work for agricultural needs and also make sandals which they sew with thongs of green leather.

The Chumas were in the past the official executioners of Mysore. They also provided the hangman's cord made of the sinews of cattle. It is said that this rope was superior to a hempen rope, and it guaranteed instant death without prolonged suffering.

The Samagaras are the main caste of tanners and leather workers in South Kanara. They are regarded as low as the Holeyas in social status. They share with the Holeyas the same religious rites and the same social customs and ways of behaviour.

Their methods of tanning hides are very primitive and therefore not very effective. But for the kind of sandals which the local people are used to wear their work is sufficient.

The leather workers of Tamilnad are called Chakkiliyan. The name

is derived from the Sanskrit word *shatkuli*, flesh-eater, and refers to their habits of eating all kinds of flesh, beef, pork, and the flesh of other impure animals. They appear to be immigrants from Andhra or Kanara, for no mention of the caste is made either in Tamil inscriptions or literature.

In South Indian society they occupy a very low rank, even the Paraiyans claim to be superior to them. There is mutual untouchability between Chakkiliyans and Paraiyans. They are much addicted to intoxicating drinks, are quarrelsome and filthy in their habits. Their sexual morals are not very strict; divorce is easily obtained and frequently applied for by men and women. The Chakkiliyan women are known for their beauty and it is said that landlords and wealthy villagers often have clandestine affairs with them. A woman of this caste is often chosen for Shakti worship.

The Chakkiliyans refuse tanning work, but buy ready-made leather which they often dye with aniline dyes. They manufacture sandals, shoes, bags and other leather articles, harnesses, bridles, and all leather work for agricultural and irrigation purposes.

Nominally they are by religion Saivites, but frequently worship evil spirits (*bhuta*). They prefer the veneration of female deities; Gangamma is their main goddess.

Shoe-Makers (Mochis)

A peculiar occupation is that of the shoe makers or Mochis. The caste seems to be a purely occupational off-shoot of the Chamars. The word *mochi* which is applied to those who make shoes, leather aprons, buckets, harnesses, portmanteaus, etc., denotes occupation rather than caste. Mochis are divided into two main classes, those who make and cobble new shoes and other leather articles, and those who merely repair them. For their pretensions the Mochis are generally disliked by the other Chamar sections. The Mochis are again sub-divided into numerous territorial sections which are generally endogamous. The Census of 1891 reported 150 sections of Hindu Mochis and 27 sections of Muslim Mochis. Their social status is nowhere high, but among the leather workers they usually hold a superior position. In Northern India they are generally called Mochi.

The Mochis in the Punjab have now largely abandoned field service and wandered off into the urban areas where they find employment as tanners and leather workers. As such they have moved into

the artisan class and are no more regarded as outcastes. Thus their social position has much improved. Moreover, in cities and towns the low castes are usually treated more liberally.

In Bihar and Bengal the Mochis and Chamars belong to one and the same caste and no distinction is made between them in social status. But in the Darjeeling area where the shoe-makers are immigrants from Nepal their social rank is very low, for they are low also in Nepal. They are called Sarkis in Darjeeling.

Also in Bengal the Mochis or Muchis are impure because of their association with leather. Their chief business is the manufacture of the slipper-like shoes worn with preference by their high caste customers. But they also make drums. The covering is made of goat skins while strips of cowhide are used for tightening the parchment. In all native drums, at one or both ends, black circles are inscribed with a paste of iron filings and rice in order to improve the pitch.

Unlike those of the Chamar caste, Muchi women never stoop to act as midwives for high caste women.

In Central India the professional shoe-makers are also called Mochi. Their status within the Chamar caste is superior because the ordinary Hindu does not consider the touch of a Mochi as polluting like that of Chamars belonging to other sections. After all, his touch cannot be avoided when he has to fit on shoes on the feet of his clients. Here again we can see that defilement is ignored if it is to the advantage of the higher castes. They have created untouchability and they can suspend it if they want to do so. The Mochis, on the other hand, observe the ordinary Hindu food taboos more carefully and will generally not eat pork and carrion, nor will Mochi women act as midwives for high caste women.

In Maharashtra the shoe-makers are also known as Mochis; but the sub-sections have each a different name. The Chaur section, among them, is very low in social rank because its members eat beef and the flesh of other forbidden animals. The Marathi Chamars and the Kalpas also make shoes.

The Mochis of Gujarat are found chiefly in towns and big villages. Besides making and repairing shoes, they now-a-days manufacture other leather articles as well. Usually those following a specific calling, form a separate sub-caste and stop interdining and intermarrying with one another. But since their origin is unknown, the other castes keep them at a distance. The Gujarati Mochis claim Rajput descent, a claim which is of course not accepted by the higher Hindu castes.

These Mochis make shoes, saddles and bags, but never tan hides. Some Mochis have learned other jobs, such as painting, electro-plating, gold and silver carving, embroidery, even brick-laying. Those who have completely given up leather work may rise a little higher in the eyes of the higher castes and be treated on an equal footing with carpenters, masons, bricklayers and other artisans. But caste Hindus will still avoid touching them.

The Mochis of Kanara too are mainly shoe-makers, but now do other work as well. They work in leather, painting, electro-plating, enamelling, making tin, silver and gold foil. They make saddles, bridles, scabbards, leather belts, bags and purses. Occasionally they accept employment in factories.

Though the Mochis of Kanara refuse to cure and tan hides, they are regarded as very low in Hindu society and only Madigas accept cooked food from their hands. Their touch is polluting, and they are obliged to reside outside the villages. Barbers and washermen may serve them, but both have to take a purificatory bath before they can serve the higher castes. Brahmins do not officiate in their religious ceremonies; their priests are Bairagis.

They eat all kinds of flesh, even carrion, and indulge freely in intoxicating drinks. They have the reputation of being quarrelsome and improvident.

There is a caste of leather workers and leather dyers in Kerala which is called Tolkollan or Tolan (skin people). They also work as gymnasts and teachers in gymnastics. Originally they have been blacksmiths, but for some reason took to leather work. They are employed mainly by Mapillahs who manufacture and sell leather goods of all kinds.

Saddle Makers

Among the leather workers those who specialise in saddles and all parts belonging to riding gear occupy a superior position. In northern India they are generally called Jingar.

Among the warlike Rajputs, in Rajasthan especially, this caste held an important place. In the past a Jingar was attached to a particular Rajput family. He made all necessary leather work, saddles, scabbards, bridles, etc., whenever required. After the cessation of the many wars in India and the subsequent decline of the Rajput fighting forces the Jingars too had to turn to humbler callings, the mending of shoes and cloth printing. But even now they prefer to associate exclu-

sively with castes which in the past served the Rajputs in some capacity. They do not accept food from low castes. But their own low caste status is shown by the fact that they permit divorce and widow marriage.

In Bengal those who make saddles and harnesses call themselves Sirbastab Kayasths. They even intermarry with them and resemble them much in manners and customs.

According to a text cited as authoritative by the Pandits of Bengal, the astrologers too were originally shoe-makers by caste, and orthodox Brahmins might refuse to accept even a drink of water from their hands.

In central India the saddle makers, called Jingar, claim to be superior even to the Mochis though the latter pretend to be of Rajput or Brahmin descent. The Jingars are skilled artisans who handle guns and other delicate instruments. If they have a permanent job with a good income, they tend to cut themselves completely loose from the Chamar caste and call themselves Jirayats.

Jingars are also found in Maharashtra. There too they are saddle and harness makers. They are found in Khandesh, in the Deccan and Konkan areas. During the frequent wars in pre-British times their services were much in demand. In present times when saddles are rarely required, the Jingars are forced to change their occupation. They are now engaged in casting metal, carving stone, painting, making toys and figures of clay and cloth, carving wood, repairing boxes, padlocks and watches.

In past times the making of saddles and their decoration required much skill. But working in leather made them impure. Among the impure castes, however, they occupied a privileged position. Though they observed the Hindu rules concerning food and social contact very carefully, it profited them little and even now no caste Hindus will accept water or food from them.

The Jingars of Maharashtra have also spilled over into Kanara. Here they do not go under the name Chamar, but they are classed with the Rachavas and Chitragars, the painters. The word Jingar is derived from the Persian word *jin*, the saddle, and here too they were originally saddle makers.

It should be noted that the manufacture of native saddlery, which formerly contained no leather, was made with cloth, felt, cotton rope, metal work, embellished with embroidery and ornamental metal bosses, involved a knowledge of handicrafts confined usually to

separate castes and thus the Jingars are also known as Jadars (weavers) and Lohars (blacksmiths). Due to their traditional occupation of painting and metal work they are classed as Rachavars.

But in present time most Jingars have abandoned their hereditary occupation as saddlers and follow now a variety of callings such as casting metals, carving stones, making toys and figures of clay and cloth, carving wood and repairing boxes, etc. They also make music instruments like *vinas* or lyres. In Maharashtra the Peshwas used to employ the Jingars as skilled craftsmen and reward them with gifts of land and houses. But in Kanara they enjoy a lower social status because here they always used leather in saddle making.

Though Brahmins officiate in all their ceremonies, and they inter-dine and intermarry with the Chitragars, the local barbers refuse to shave them on the ground of their supposed impurity. No higher castes will accept cooked food from them. Another sign of their low caste status is the custom of eating meat and fish and drinking liquor. In Mysore the Jingars are not forbidding divorce, but widows may not remarry.

The saddlers of Kanara, Andhra and Tamilnad are called Jinigar. They too have given up saddlery, and taken to wood carving and the manufacture of lac articles. They produce lacquer fans, trays, circular table tops and paintings of Hindu deities and scenes from Indian mythology. In Ganjam they paint leather dishmats with pictures of deities and floral designs. They also make toys and models in paper and pith.

Book Binders, Painters, Sculptors

It is interesting that book binding, painting and sculpture are arts which originated within the Chamar caste. The book binder, Jildgar, used originally to bind books in leather. The painter, Chitrakar, belongs to the Mochi caste probably because he uses brushes made of the hair of animals. An additional reason might be that he painted pictures on leather for the popular shadow plays and puppet plays which in some regions are still performed by members of a particular caste, originally descended from Chamars. It is intriguing to think that the immortal paintings of Ajanta and other famous places in India are most probably creations of artists by whose touch a caste-Hindu would have felt defiled. But even the stone workers and sculptors, as also the brass workers who created the wonderful temple figures and carvings on the walls belonged originally to castes of a low

social status though later the caste Hindus conceded very grudgingly a better social standing to artisans working for the temples.¹

The traditional work of these painters is to paint pictures of deities on paper which people hang on the wall for a day and then throw away; to paint the bodies of men who play tiger during the Moharram festival; to manufacture the clay paper-covered masks of monkeys and demons for the Ramlila; to make the *tazias* or figures of Hussain's tomb for the Moharram procession; to manufacture the wedding crown in the marriage season; they also make artificial flowers, Chinese lanterns, little clay dolls and even clay images of deities for the temples.

A variation of this caste is that of the Chitrakathis or Hardas. These are religious mendicants and picture showers in northern Maharashtra and in central India. At markets or religious fairs they exhibit the pictures of gods and heroes and tell their stories. Some entertain the crowds with shadow plays, while others have sets of puppets by means of which they enact scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata or other literary or legendary sources. The social status of this caste is rather low because they not only lead an unsteady life, and beg, but they also have the reputation of sexual laxity and of prostituting their wives and daughters. Occasionally they trade in buffaloes or sell milk. They are not averse to committing thefts whenever the opportunity arises. But the caste is slowly dying out.

The Census of India, 1901, clearly stated that the Chitrakaras of Ganjam in Orissa were a sub-section of the Muchis.

The Chitragaras of Mysore State, however, have higher pretensions and claim to belong to the Rachavar caste and to be Kshatriyas. They wear the sacred thread. But many low castes make such claims. The Chitragaras are today painters, decorators and gilders, and make trunks, palanquins, lacquer toys, stationary articles and wooden images of temples, cars, etc. They manufacture toys with very primitive tools, but great artistic skill.

Others manufacture big wooden images of gods and goddesses, such as Ellamma and Mariamma, and vehicles for various deities in the shape of bulls, snakes, peacocks, lions, tigers and horses. They further make painted figures of Lakshmi and heads of Gauri, for the annual worship of these goddesses. They also make receptacles for the household gods (salagrama stone, lingam, etc.) worshipped daily by Brahmins.

¹cf. R. V. Russell and Hiralal, IV, 1916, pp. 246-8.

The Modern Shoe Industry in India

India has 178.3 million head of cattle, one fifth of the whole cattle population in the world. No other country exports as many semi-treated hides, goat-skins, sheep and pig skins as India. India produces annually 172 million pairs of leather shoes. Another 60 million are made of rubber, canvas and PVC. India's footwear industry employs 8,800,000 workers. But there are only 17 mechanised factories and just over 7,000 small scale and family units which account for 80 per cent of the total production. Only 20 per cent of the industry is mechanised.

But only one Indian in five buys leather shoes. The biggest single manufacturer is the Bata Company, with over 2,000 retail shops employing 50,000 workers. The Bata Company produces 200,000 pairs a day. Corona Sahu and Flex are nearest competitors.

The average annual expenditure of a middle class Indian family of six on footwear is between Rs.150.00 and 200.00, while an American family spends Rs. 2,000.

Sandals and chappals have the widest sale—90 million pairs every year.

A majority of Indians do not wear shoes until their teens. Bare feet splay the toes, change the arch and flatten the ball of the foot. Therefore, when children finally begin to wear shoes almost half do not fit and complications occur. Feet continue to grow until the age of twenty-one.

Shoe-making is a cottage industry which depends on traditional skills. Forty years ago there were no leather factories worth the name. Shoes were made by cobblers working with the tools used by their forefathers. Most people wore chappals or sandals. Only the westernised wore shoes styled after those worn in Europe.

In the late 1930s larger units were commissioned to make boots for the army. The statistics of 1947 showed that only 23 per cent of Indians wore any kinds of footwear.

Although India has the largest stock of raw material, the cost of shoes in the country is prohibitive. One reason is that only half of the dead cattle is used, the other half are wasted by delays in transport, poor flaying and tanning. There is plenty of vegetable tanning material in India, especially myrobolan and hyrobolan nuts, but no full use is made of it. India takes the easiest course of exporting raw and semi-tanned hides instead of processing them into finished products. While other countries banned exports of semi-finished leather, India

exported in 1971-72 semi-finished leather for 1,000,000,000 (one thousand million) rupees.

The Central Leather Research Institute in Madras, set up in 1944, provides training in leather technology, refresher courses for private tanners as well as short-term orientation in productivity and scientific management.

The largest shoe-making centre is Agra. Fifty thousand craftsmen work in three categories. The small units, about 300 of them, produce 150 pairs of shoes a day, with each employee earning Rs. 6.00. In the second group are the "namewallas" (1,000 units) who make 30 to 40 pairs and earn Rs. 5.00 a day. In the third section are the "daliawallas" or cottage units, 2,000 in number, which make 20 to 30 pairs daily and earn Rs. 3.00 per worker.

All three categories produce hand-made shoes. The difference in the categories is that while small-scale units use superior raw materials, the cottage units obtain poor quality leather and have less-skilled workers.

The footwear industry caters for the common pocket. The PVC (Poly-Vinyl-Chloride) sandals, priced around Rs. 5.00 to 7.00, are selling forty million pairs annually. Of this, a quarter is made by the Bata Company. The "Hawaiian rubber Chappal" has, for the last five years, been topping fifty million pairs annually, at the cost of between Rs. 8.00 and 10.00.¹

5. Washermen

In a country like India where ritual purity is so highly valued, the washerman is an important man. But since he is dealing with soiled and ritually impure clothes, he too is naturally of low social status. He ranks just below the barber. As he washes the clothes of high-caste people, he cannot touch those of the impure castes. They have washermen of their own caste, or give their soiled clothes to a subsection of the washerman caste, so degraded that in the past they could not even show their face to men and had to go out only at night.

The washermen (Dhobi — from Sanskrit *dhar*, to wash; or Warthi, Baretha, Chakla, Rajak, or Parit) are a functional caste, recruited obviously from various menial communities, such as the Chamars, Doms, Basors, and others. In Madras, for instance, the Chakla.

¹B. Vohra, 1973, pp. 36-41. Meanwhile prices have doubled.

caste is working in leather, while in Chanda the washerman is called Chakla.

In northern and central India, also in Bengal and Kanara, the washerman belongs to the ordinary village staff and receives his wages in kind after the harvest like the artisans. In northern India a washerman receives sixteen pounds of grain per crop, i. e., twice a year per married woman in a family, for his services. He gets nothing from men, because they are supposed to wash their clothes themselves. The women do it also; but after childbirth a woman's clothes and beddings must be washed by a washerman.

In the west and south of India all but the wealthy do their own washing, or through the women of the family. In these regions the washermen are in the social scale just below the barbers. An exception is made in Tamilnad. There the Vannar have a sub-division which will wash the clothes of the untouchable castes. For this occupation they are relegated to the lowest status in society and in the past were not even allowed to appear in public by day-light, but had to hide themselves and could venture out only at night, because their very sight was polluting.

In Kerala only the women of the caste do the washing while the menfolk are engaged as tailors. The Nayar have a caste of washermen for themselves, under the title of Veluttedar or Vanattar who often claim membership of the caste which they serve.

The Kanarese washermen are called Agasas while in Andhra their name is Chakla. They have a sub-division which has taken to dyeing and now holds itself superior to the rest of the caste. A similar connection exists in the Punjab between the washermen and the dyers, but there both castes are interchangeable.

The washermen are considered impure and are therefore not allowed to enter the houses of the higher castes. The handling of soiled clothes is considered a polluting task, especially since the washerman has also to wash the clothes of menstruating women and mothers after childbirth. Menstrual and puerperal blood is most impure and polluting in the eyes of the Hindus. It is ironic that someone who is an untouchable is the only person who can wash clothes to make them ritually clean.

In north India the Dhobi also uses as his transport the donkey, like the potter, and would for the use of this unclean animal be considered impure if there were no other reasons. Dhobis now use bullocks also to transport the laundry.

The Dhobis hold themselves superior to the Chamars, Basors, Bhangis and Khatiks and refuse to wash their clothes. Nor do they accept food from these castes. Mutual relations with these other impure castes are far from cordial. With the Pasis (toddy tappers) the washermen live in a perpetual struggle for superiority, as they claim a higher rank since the Pasis keep pigs. But the Pasi looks down on the Dhobi because the latter washes his soiled clothes, even clothes soiled by menstruating or puerperal blood.

But even within the caste community there is a deep-rooted disunity. For the washermen are everywhere divided into endogamous sub-divisions which are generally territorially localised. Though each of these sub-sections pursue the same occupation of washing clothes, they maintain, due to some—often trivial—cultural differences, social distance from each other. Thus the Dhobis of Delhi, for instance, call themselves Sheheri (city-dwellers) and look down on other Dhobi sections up-country and refuse to interdine and intermarry with them.

The washermen are in general quite conservative in their methods of washing clothes. Though they may use modern soap and even chemical washing powder, they maintain that their traditional methods of washing are far superior to modern washing machines. Except in Kerala, the main work is done by men; the women do only the pressing and eventually the ironing of clothes.

The Dhobis are Hindus and their main deity is the god of the *ghats* or washing places on the river or tank. On Dasehra they worship the stone on which they beat their clothes. In central India and Bengal the washerman has a function in the ritual of wedding of the higher castes. A present from him to the bride is considered very auspicious.

Many jokes are told about the washermen, especially about the frequent damage done to the clothes by their rough handling of them and the alleged custom of the Dhobis to lend the clothes of their clients to outsiders for a small fee or for wearing them themselves before returning them to their owners.

In central India the Dhobi receives twenty to forty pounds of grain a year, according to the number of persons in the family, besides the six extra pounds due to him at seed-time and harvest, and when he washes the clothes he also gets his food in the houses. Ordinary villagers have their clothes washed by the Dhobi once a fortnight with the exception of their loin-clothes which they wash themselves daily. Women wash their upper garments (*saris*) every day in good castes and

may not take their food till they have done so; but among the lower classes the women wash their clothes only once in four or five days. By a daily wash they would be worn out too soon. At weddings the Dhobi gets a rupee or half a rupee for washing the clothes of the guests, and at births and deaths he also receives a small present, double the amount if a boy is born or a man has died.

The washermen at Puri in Orissa also belong to the Scheduled Castes. Though there is no actual segregation, the washermen usually live by themselves in the village. They serve the higher castes under the *jajmani* system. The lower castes, such as potters or leather workers, are not served by them. The clients are frequently passed on from father to son, though a washerman may also acquire new clients wherever possible. Where washermen are too numerous they may be forced to take over other occupations, farming, farm service or cattle tending.

The washermen wash the clothes of those with whom they stand in *jajmani* relationship. But they carry out other duties as well. Thus, when a death occurs in a patron's house, the washerman has to chop all the wood required for cremation and has also to build up the pyre. In return, he receives the bier, bedding utensils and such clothes in which the corpse was dressed. He is also been given a fee in cash, a rupee perhaps, and from two to six kg rice, in accordance to the economic condition of the bereaved family.

The remuneration for washing clothes in a *jajman* (patron's) house is permanently fixed. The washerman gets his pay in grain (rice) payable after the harvest (in December-January). But for reckoning service, the year begins with the sowing festival in spring (March). Then accounts are settled, arrears adjusted and advance payments made for the coming year.

In addition to this regular remuneration, the washerman's wife receives presents of food during various festivals. She visits the patrons' houses on such days armed with her pot, bowl and basket, and is presented with specially prepared sweetmeats, curry and rice etc., by the wives of the patrons.

The washermen of Puri are divided into four territorial groups, each supervised by a headman. At caste meetings the affairs of the particular sub-division are discussed under his direction.

The washermen of Maharashtra are called Parit. They are of low caste, but not untouchables. In dress and food they resemble the Kunbis. They are divided into regional endogamous sections

consisting of exogamous clans. Cross cousin marriage, widow marriage and divorce are in practice among the Parits. A widow may not marry a member of her dead husband's clan. The Parits practise cremation.

In Kanara the washermen are called Agasa or Madivala. Madivala is a 'cleaner of cloth', while the original meaning of Agasa is 'a bleacher.' The Agasas narrate various legends to explain the origin of their caste. They are of low social status and live in separate quarters in the village, but near the high castes. They carry their laundry on donkeys.

The Agasas have many endogamous sub-divisions with territorial names, but no exogamous clans. They are organised in lineages; each lineage worships a tutelary deity. Members of the same ancestral group cannot intermarry. They permit widow marriage and divorce though the reasons for divorce are only two: adultery and expulsion from the caste.

The washermen of Kanara worship the local Hindu deities. But they themselves act as priests for certain goddesses (the Seven Sisters, who cause epidemics like smallpox and Cholera. One of the ceremonies in the worship of the 'Seven Sisters' is fire-walking; the Agasa priest is supposed to lead the group of devotees over the fire.

In the village each washerman has a certain hereditary number of clients whose clothes he washes. He is given his wages in kind at harvest time. In addition he receives the clothes a girl has worn during her first menstruation. During the days of menstruation the washerman has to wash her clothes daily. This service is indispensable. It is also his duty and privilege to announce this event to the family of her husband. He is duly rewarded for the good news.

Agasas are also supposed to act as torchbearers for persons of rank who visit the village and on festive occasions, and to accompany important visitors and officials on their errands and guide them to their next destination.

The Agasas eat all kinds of food, but no beef. In social rank they are lower than the potters (Kumbaras) from whom they accept food, but they are higher than the impure Holeyas and Madigas. They refuse to wash their clothes.

The washermen of Kanara are said to buy rarely ever any clothes for themselves. They are accused of wearing the clothes of their clients

surreptitiously.

The washermen of Andhra are called Tsakala. It is also their traditional duty to act as torch and palanquin bearers. In the past they had often to carry touring officials and landlords from place to place for small or no wages at all. Now they also work as peons in government and other offices. They also do dyeing work.

The Tsakalas still receive their wages as washermen from the farmers of Andhra in grain in the harvest season. But on festive occasions they receive some additional gifts since they have to render specific services. They provide torches for processions and weddings, they wash the clothes soiled by a girl during her first menstruation. These clothes are given to him after the feast is over. At weddings the Tsakala has to perform certain tasks for which he is specially paid. At funerals he receives the cloth which covered the face of the corpse and the paddy piled up around his head. Whenever a fowl is sacrificed it is the washerman's task to wring its head.

The Tsakalas have many sections, each of which serves a particular caste. One section serves even the Malas and Madigas.

The washermen in Tamilnad and Kerala are called Vannan. The word is supposed to be derived from *vannam*, beauty. Having to wash all the filthy clothes of the villagers, especially the ritually impure clothes (stained by menstrual blood or by childbirth, for instance) the washermen are naturally regarded as an unclean caste. They are next below the barbers in social position. In former times the Vannans were not permitted to enter the houses of Brahmins and other high-caste people. Clothes washed by the Vannans had to be washed again by a member of the household before they could be worn without defilement. The washermen have also ritual functions to perform in the villages, and on certain occasions they play the drum associated with goddess possession.

The Vannans are divided into several sections which are graded according to the rank of the caste of their customers. These sections often do not intermarry. One section which serves the Paraiyans is even inferior to the Paraiyan caste in social rank. They accept cooked food from the Paraiyans when they wash their clothes. But the Paraiyans do not accept food from their hands. No other Vannan section intermarries with this Paraiyan Vannan section.

But all Vannan sections eat meat and drink liquor, often in excess. Like other low castes, they practise widow marriage and divorce. Their wives act as midwives for the women of higher castes.

In Kerala there is a washerman caste called Mannan which washes the clothes of the impure castes and of pure castes in a temporary state of pollution, such as clothes polluted by menstrual blood, by childbirth or death. The work is done mainly by the Mannan women. The menfolk prefer engagements as exorcists and devil dancers. In the past they also acted as the physicians of the villagers and treated even high-caste patients. They are also tailors.

In Kerala certain Bhagavati temples are served by Vannan priests who perform the sacrifices of goats and fowls due to the goddess.

6. *Toddy Tappers and Liquor Sellers*

Toddy is a mildly intoxicating drink obtained from the fermented juice of the palmyra or date palm, or of the coconut tree. An incision is made in the spadix and the juice collected from it is allowed to ferment. This happens in a few hours. Toddy does not contain more than five percent alcohol, but is rich in vitamins B₁, B₂ and C and thus possesses a nutritive value in the diet of the people which is so often defective of certain vitamins. As it is believed that fresh toddy obtained before sunrise is not intoxicating, even Muslims can drink it. Toddy, like liquor in other parts of India, is of great social importance because it is drunk in quantities on festive occasions, during wedding and funeral feasts, and at caste meetings.

The castes which live by tapping the palm for its juice take usually a position between the lower artisans and the field labourers. In some parts of India they form a sufficiently large group to be considered as important. The reason why they are classed so low in social status is either their non-Aryan origin, or their occupation with toddy which the high-caste Hindus regard as impure because it ferments easily and is thus intoxicating.

These castes are found in greatest concentration along the coasts wherever the coconut and palmyra palm abounds and in the Gangetic valley where the date palm flourishes. But in lower Bengal and on the Gujarat coast, though palm trees are in abundance, no special castes tap the trees. The cultivators do it themselves, or their servants and even casual labourers.

The tree-tapping is nowhere a full-time occupation; everywhere these castes are at the same time cultivators, either as landholders or tenants, or as mere field labourers.

In the Punjab, the distiller and seller of liquor is called Kalar or

Kalwar; in Peshawar, however, the word means potter. He is also called Neb in Nabha and Patiala. A Muslim Kalar is Kakkezai and a Sikh Kalar is Ahluwalia. The former ruling family of Kapurthala belonged originally to this caste. Those Kalars who due to prohibition or to conversion to Islam have lost their jobs, usually engage in commerce and sell shoes, bread, vegetables and other commodities in which men of good caste object to deal. The Kalars are an enterprising, hard working and obstinate people. A proverb in the Punjab says: "Death may budge, but a Kalar never won't!"

Their original social status is very low; but the Muslim and Sikh Kalars enjoy a better position. Some of them are quite wealthy.

The chief caste of the toddy tappers in the Ganges valley are the Pasis. The name *pasi* is derived from the Sanskrit *pashika* (one who uses the noose) or the Hindi *pas* or *pasao*, the noose, either referring to the belt by means of which the tree is climbed, or to the snare which the hunters of the caste use. It may also refer to the noose which the Thugs used in strangling their victims. For many Pasis had joined the Thugs in their activities.

It is the traditional occupation of the Pasis to extract the juice of the *palura* tree (*tar*) and of the date-palm (*khajur*). The juice of the latter tree they mainly use for the manufacture of sugar, as it is believed to cause rheumatism if drunk.

But the Pasis are very numerous, and toddy tapping cannot support such numbers. Some of the Pasis earn their livelihood as fowling and hunters; others make and mend grinding stones; some are building contractors, cultivators or field labourers. They also thatch houses with the leaves of the palm trees. They are employed as messengers and watchmen in the houses of the landlords, and perform every kind of work demanded by their masters. They are usually found to be honest and reliable. Such servants go under the name of *gorait*. Goraites receive special gifts on festive occasions when a wedding or funeral takes place in the master's house.

Though presently engaged in such lowly jobs, they have traditions that in the past the Pasis owned and ruled the land on which they are now treated as servants. They were obviously overrun and enslaved by the Rajputs and other invaders of superior power.

The Pasis are split into numerous endogamous sub-sections which are territorial or occupational; exogamous clans are absent, the Pasis practise merely kin exogamy.

They worship the local Hindu deities. Brahmins officiate at their

weddings and other ceremonies, but avoid touching them and their belongings in the house. In the olden days the Pasis had their own priests. They consider it a matter of prestige to have Brahmins performing their ceremonies.

The Pasis are not untouchables though undoubtedly low in social status. There exists a strong competition with the washermen (Dhobi). The Pasis claim to rank higher than the washermen and refuse to accept their food and water. But the Dhobis do not admit such claims, though they wash their clothes.

A strong antagonism exists also between Pasis and Ahirs (cowherds, but nowadays largely cultivators). Ahirs treat the Pasis as untouchables which the latter of course resent very strongly. They retaliate by rarely attending Ahir weddings and funerals. The Ahirs do not accept food cooked by a Pasi, nor water from his hand, and, at a religious ceremony, they also refuse to accept *prasad* (offering to the deity, later distributed among the devotees) unless prepared and distributed by a Brahmin priest. It is however alleged that Ahirs are not averse to having illicit sex affairs with Pasi women.

Like all low castes, the Pasis allow widow marriage and divorce. Conjugal morality is somewhat lax. The Pasis have a caste council and the headman of each group guides his subjects according to the ancient traditions of the caste.

In the past the Pasis were notorious for their criminal activities. It is well known that great numbers of Pasis had joined the fraternity of the Thugs. They also formed the bodyguards of rich landlords who allowed them to earn their livelihood by plundering their tenants and dependents.

The Pasis are not only toddy tappers but also mighty drinkers of toddy. They breed pigs and cure the bacon obtained from them. They are not very fastidious in their eating habits and do not observe the customary Hindu food taboos.

Further west, in Bengal, is the liquor distilling and liquor selling caste Sunri (106,870 in 1961). Many Sunris are now merchants. In spite of their fairly affluent condition, they are in West Bengal a low caste.

The distillers and sellers of fermented liquor in Central India are called Kalar. They are very numerous, and consequently divided into a number of endogamous sub-divisions. They claim descent from the Bania caste, but the claim is not recognised by the high castes. They are strict in the observance of Hindu customs and rules but it helps

them little. Their social status is that of the village menials, below that of the cultivators. Though Brahmins do not accept food and water from them nor serve them as priests, the Kalars are not untouchables. They rank socially as high as the oilpressers with whom they often compete in the exploitation of the tribals in the hills of Central India. For both these castes are the money-lenders of the tribals in this area.

In Central India the Kalars distil their liquor mainly from the fermented flowers of the Mahua tree (*Bassia latifolia*). They are to a large extent responsible for the great poverty of the tribal population in Central India.

The Kalars carry out their calling not only in Central India, but also in Maharashtra, especially in its northern regions. The liquor they distil is also from the mahua tree. It is called *daru*; it is stronger than palm or rice wine.

The professional toddy tappers on the west coast around Bombay are called Bhandari or Bharguna. Since the introduction of prohibition by the Indian Government, the Bhandaris were forced to change over to farming or other trades. But wherever permitted they distil liquor from forest produce and sugar in the state distilleries. Many Bhandaris themselves are addicted to liquor and meat. This probably is the reason for their low social position.

In former centuries they were recruited as soldiers by the Marathas and later by the British. For some time they were the soldiers of the island of Bombay.

By religion they are mainly Saivites. Some have become Christians. The Hindus among them generally cremate their dead, though burial in a sitting or lying position is also practised. They eat the flesh of goats, sheep, fowls, hares, deer and fish, but no beef.

They are divided into eight endogamous sub-sections and these again into exogamous kinship groups (*kula*). Some *kula* names are obviously of Maratha origin. Inheritance is in the male line.

The distillers in Orissa, on the coast south of Bengal, are the Boads. When in 1870 the British Government prohibited private distillation, the Boads monopolised the sale of liquor and made good profits. Many succeeded in acquiring much land. This went on until 1920 when prohibition was introduced and all liquor shops were closed. The improvement of their economic condition inspired the Boads to demand a rise in social status; from the position of a low caste the Boads wished to rise into a high caste, disputing with the Kshatriyas

for second place.

When the news of the Temple Entrance agitation reached them, they also demanded that the Hindu temples should be opened to them. But the high-castes refused to do so and the Boad distillers had to build their own temples. They have made other efforts to raise their social status by conforming strictly to Hindu customs and regulations. Though distillers and dealers in alcohol, the Boads do not drink liquor. They are strict vegetarians, and they accept neither food nor water from any caste but the Brahmins. Thus they are stricter than the Brahmins who accept water from Kshatriyas and herdsmen.

In the past the social status of the Boad caste was low. They were the official musicians of the village. After playing on festive occasions they used to ask for gifts from house to house. They skinned dead cattle, ate beef and traded in cattle hides. They no longer do all these things. But as long as the memory of the former low status of the Boads persists, they have little chance of improving it and reaching the status of Kshatriyas in spite of their wealth so recently acquired.

On the coast, just south of Orissa, live two small castes of toddy drawers and distillers, the Segidis and the Yatas. The Yatas also weave mats and baskets from palmyra leaves, in spite of their name which refers to the date palm. The Segidis or Shegadis draw juice only from the *sindi* palm (*Phoenix sylvestris*) and not from the palmyra palm (*Borassus flabelliformis*). This is the job of the Yatas who for this reason are looked down on by the Segidis. The latter do not accept water from the Yatas. For the Segidis have a fairly good social status in the local caste hierarchy. They are served by the barbers and washermen of the upper castes, and Brahmin priests and Vaishnava *gurus* function at their ceremonies. The Segidis are permitted to enter the temple enclosure.

In Andhra and on the Coromandal coast the tree-tapping castes are fairly strong. The Idigas, who are the principal caste among them, are an offshoot of the great Balija caste with whom they still interdine. The split seems to have taken place for functional reasons though the Idigas abstain from drinking liquor. They employ Brahmins of good standing for their worship. They pay special homage to the goddess of toddy and other intoxicating drinks. They also call themselves Indras, but the designation of Idiga, from the verb 'to extract' or 'draw', like that from the climbing loop in either cases, seems to indicate the more appropriate title.

The Gamallas, Gaundlas or Gamandlas, are also a toddy-tapping

caste of the same locality. It has a sub-section called Idiga. The two castes were probably once united, but later formed separate communities. In social status, however, the Gamallas are somewhat lower; they rank with the petty cultivators and more respectable field labourers. Brahmins function for their worship, except for their funerals, when they must invite Satani priests.

The Kapus of Nellore District employ Gamallas as their cooks and domestic servants, and on occasion of festivals and weddings all menial service and cooking are done by Gamallas.

Like many other Telugu castes, the Gamallas too have a caste of beggars attached to them. They are called Eneti and beg only from Gamallas.

Returning to the west coast, to Kanara, we meet in the north of the state the toddy-tapping Ilgar, Kalal or Shindigar. They are partly Hindus and partly Lingayats. The latter abstain from drinking palm juice.

Two similar castes in the same area are the Paiks and the Billavas. Both caste names are derived from the military service which in past times they are supposed to have rendered to the Vijayanagar kings and the Tulu chiefs. The Paiks were the infantry, and on the strength of this tradition they now claim Kshatriya rank. They prefer to be called Namdhara instead of Paik or Pai. Their claims are of course not accepted by the local high castes.

Another etymology of the name is from Pai, the spirit worshipped by toddy-tapping castes. At present about half of the Paiks are engaged in farm work. The Paiks speak Canarese. They employ their own priests or invite Satanis for their religious ceremonies.

The Paiks, also called Halepaiks, are known for their totemism. Each exogamous clan is named after an animal or plant which is held sacred by its members. The totem (*bali*) should not be injured by them. It is inherited in the female line. This suggests that the Paiks came from the south where matriliney is widely practised.

Socially the Paiks rank higher than the Agers, Mukris or Chamars, but they are still impure and treated as such by all higher castes. They cannot draw water from the wells of the high castes. Village barbers and washermen do not serve them. They cannot enter a temple. But Brahmin priests are beginning to serve them.

The Billavas or Billoru further south are Tulu speaking. Though their name—bowmen—would signify them as former soldiers, they are today toddy tappers or cultivators, either on their own fields or

as tenants, or field labourers. They differ from the Halepaiks by collecting toddy in a pot while the Halepaiks use a gourd.

The Billavas eat meat, but no beef or pork. Nor do they catch fish though they eat it. Village barbers and washermen render them services, but do not eat in their houses nor do the Billavas accept food from them. They also refuse to eat food prepared by Holeyas and Bedas. But Brahmins treat the Billavas as untouchables, not so castes like the Gaudas and Shettis.

The Billavas are famous for their demon worship. They keep innumerable demon shrines whose priests are always Billavas. The so-called demon dance is performed by the Billava priests and members of other low castes. They allegedly get possessed by the demons (*bhuta*). Matters on which the clients want information or guidance are brought before the possessed dancers and the demon is supposed to speak through the mouth of the media.

The south of the Indian peninsula is occupied by three large tree tapping castes, probably of common racial stock. The Ezhavas or Ilavas, the Tiyar, and the Shanar or Nadar. The name Ezhavan, which is now applied to only one of the three castes, was in the past used for all of them. It means a native of Sri Lanka (Ceylon), 'Ilam' being the ancient Tamil name for Sri Lanka. Tiyar also means a resident of Sri Lanka, being derived from *dvipa*, island. It is believed that these castes brought the coconut palm to India where it was previously unknown. This happened some time before the beginning of the Christian era.

The Ezhavas, who in the extreme north of Kerala State are also called Tiyya, numbered in 1951 about 3,700,000. A century ago they were in Kerala a polluting caste who had to keep a distance of twenty to thirty feet from a Nayar. But they, in turn, claimed to be polluted by castes lower than theirs. For among the untouchables they hold the highest rank. In the past they were not allowed to enter the temple enclosure. In the native states of Cochin and Travancore many temples were closed to Ezhavas and other low castes. Only in 1936 in Travancore and in 1947 in Cochin all temples were declared open to the Ezhavas. But by that time they had built their own temples.

Such a large caste as that of the Ezhavas is of course divided into a great number of endogamous territorial sub-sections. But the caste has also a graded structure, with special titles bestowed on certain families by the former rulers. Thus the Izhavattis, who are the priests of the caste, form a distinct section with special manners and

customs. The Channanso, or chiefs, have the most important title of the Ezhavas. Panikkan comes next in rank, and is derived from *pani*, work. Tantan, from *danda*, punishment or control, is a popular title in some parts. Asan, from *acharya*, a teacher, is very common. The recipients of this title were instructors in gymnastics and military exercises for soldiers in bygone times. Some Ezhavas in South Travancore had the title Mudaliyar.

It is interesting that the Ezhavas had a sub-section which in the past consisted of their slaves. They are called Vadavan. They could regularly be bought and sold. The Nadis, on the other hand, were people who had been excommunicated from the community for various offences by the headmen and were forbidden to enter the kitchen of the Ezhavas. The regular priests of the caste refused to officiate in their religious ceremonies. They engaged priests who belonged to a special, outcaste group, like themselves. The Vadavans and the Nadis are the sections which still do the toddy-tapping jobs.

Though the traditional occupation of the Ezhavas was toddy-tapping the actual number engaged in this profession was always small, about three percent only. The majority of them are now tenant farmers, field labourers and traders. Occupying the northern regions of Kerala, the Ezhavas are economically better off, better educated and more enterprising than the southern Tiyar who have remained poor, illiterate and are in their majority still merely toddy tappers and field labourers. The Ezhavas, on the other hand, have secured many government jobs and are a progressive community. The Tiyar also still practise matriliney and polyandry, and claim that the polyandrous system is helpful to keep the family together.

As mentioned before, the Hindus treat the Ezhavas as untouchables. But they themselves do not like to be called Harijans. In the recent past they have played a revolutionary role in Kerala politics. Their revolt against their degraded position started already towards the end of the last century. They started first by adopting the social customs and habits of the Nayar. Then they built their own temples and enthusiastically learned the Hindu Shastras. They had three great caste leaders: Shri Narayana Guru, T. K. Madhavan and the poet Kumaran Asan. The Ezhavas took a prominent part in the agitation for temple entry.

Today they are an important community with writers, journalists, philosophers and politicians of repute. Still, on the whole, their efforts for improvement have been restricted to their own community, with

little concern for the other low castes of Kerala.¹

Still further south, there is a smaller group, the Tandar, probably a sub-section of the Tiayar, though not intermarrying with them. This caste has the curious custom of prohibiting their women from crossing a local river. As those on the south bank are better off than their kinsfolk on the north side, this restriction may have a solid practical basis.

In the time when a number of independent rajas ruled in Kerala, the Tandans seemed to have joined military service, and thus separated from the Ezhavas. With the return of peaceful times, they were forced to return to their old occupation of palm tapping. They are also largely engaged in rope making and in guarding the villages. In the past they also acted as the executioners of the Rajas. The name of the caste is said to indicate this, Tandan being derived from the Sanskrit word *dandanam* or punishment.

The Tandans have their own priests who are also their barbers. They practise fraternal polyandry, a custom which the Ezhavas abhor.

The third of the tree tapping castes in southern India is called Shanar or Nadar. They live mainly in Tinnevely and Madurai districts of Tamilnad though they have spread to some extent over the neighbouring districts too. The word *shanam* is not found in the early Tamil dictionaries or in the inscriptions of the Middle Age. In inscriptions of the tenth century the toddy tappers are called Illuan. The name *shanam* is said to be derived from *san* and *nar*, signifying a span-long noose—the rope used for climbing a palm tree.

Since 150 years the Nadar have tried to rise from their low social status and to attain the position of a Shudra caste. They have gradually abandoned their traditional occupation of toddy tapping, adopted the practices of the higher castes, asked for the services of Brahmin priests and claimed Kshatriya status. The caste came into prominence in 1899 when it asserted by force its right to enter the temples of the Maravan caste on the score of their Kshatriya origin. But this title was rejected by the Hindu high-castes and the whole agitation failed. Then the Nadar turned from their social ambition to the improvement of their economic condition, and they have been quite successful in this endeavour. They have risen in wealth and acquired a fairly good education. This has given them political power if not a respected position in the caste system.

¹cf. R. Velayudhan, 1958; A. Ayappan, 1965, pp. 115-75.

It is alleged that the Kadamba dynasty of Mysore sprang from one of the Nadar sub-divisions. Subsequently many members of the caste were employed in the army and afterwards settled as semi-military peasantry or labouring class upon the land occupied.

At present the general status of the Nadar or Shanar in society is that of the lower field labourers, just above that of the menial castes. In the past, indeed, the Nadar, like the weavers, were prohibited from living within the village precincts.

In the other parts of India there is either not enough occupation for a special caste of this type, or the work is done by other castes which are not specially engaged in toddy tapping.

7. *Scavenging Castes*

The need for the disposal of waste and rubbish in the Indian cities and villages has resulted in the creation of special castes, the scavenging castes. The proper disposal of human faecal matter is especially important for the environmental sanitation of a community, but even more so for ritual purity. In India, a complete drainage system existed as early as Mohenjo daro; there latrines and bathrooms were built in each house and connected with drains.

But in classical Sanskrit texts no mention is made of a caste like the Bhangis, removers of nightsoil. In western India it is alleged that the sweeper caste came into existence with the advent of the Muslims. In fact, they are found mainly in the cities, while in the villages they are kept particularly for the removal of dead animals other than cleft-footed cattle, goats and sheep.

Removal and disposal of nightsoil is one of the major problems in cities. In the old-fashioned towns of India each house was provided with service-type latrines, and the sweeper came every morning to remove the nightsoil.

In the villages, however, conditions are different. In most parts of the country it is the custom of the villagers to go out to the fields for defecation. Often the people there object to privies in the house or courtyard as there is no place to build them properly and it is difficult to keep them clean and odourless. Thus for the removal of nightsoil no sweeper is required in most villages, except where even in villages the women are confined to the homestead and may not go to the fields. But there the scavengers are kept busy with the removal of other waste matter and especially of dead and polluting animals.

In spite of the great importance of the scavenging castes for health and hygiene, and in particular for the ritual purity of city and village population, they are regarded as the lowest of all castes in India. Whatever may be their standard of morality and laxity in observing the Hindu food regulations, the scavengers are degraded because of their occupation as cleaners of village and latrine.

The names of the scavenging castes suggest that they are a functional community recruited from many different racial and social groups. Some of them might have been compelled to take on this occupation by the society to which they were subject, others were reduced by economic necessity to have recourse to it. The great variations in the physical appearance of the different sections of the respective communities, but also the varied recruitment from higher castes of "broken men"—outcastes, destitutes, etc., illegitimate connections between the scavengers and their employers may also frequently have resulted in the impregnation of the sections undertaking domestic service with the blood of higher castes.

In most parts of India the scavenging castes are just large enough to meet the demand for them. But in northern India there are large sweeper castes, which cannot all find employment in their traditional calling and therefore do a lot of other work, mainly on the fields.

The sweepers of northern India go under various names. The most common name is that of Mehtar, which is really a title meaning 'prince' or 'leader'. It is not known who gave this title to the lowest and most despised caste of northern India. Another name for the sweeper caste is Bhangi. This name might derive from the habit of the scavengers to take *bhang*, the intoxicating hemp plant. Others derive the word from *bhangis*, meaning 'broken'. This would however only fit those scavengers who split bamboos and plait mats and baskets. Though this occupation is assumed by the scavengers in some regions, it is not common enough to explain the caste name. In the Punjab the scavengers are known as Chuhras. This name probably come from *chura jharna*, to sweep scraps. Another name common in the Punjab and in northern India generally is Valmiki or Lalbegi. These are the names of two patron saints of the scavengers, the first being a Hindu, the second a Muslim saint. Another name in northern India is Hela. Sweepers are thus called because they carry baskets full of sweepings, or because they are also the traditional town-criers.

But certain other castes too might do scavenging, and thus the sweepers are called by the names of these castes, such as Doms,

Dumras, Dhanuks, Makhias, Ghasias, even Mahars and Mangs, or Dhers.

These and other names usually also signify endogamous sub-divisions, which are again sub-divided into exogamous clans, often named after animals, plants or the villages and towns from which these clans are supposed to have come many generations ago.

Almost all sub-castes or clans, or village communities belonging to a particular sub-section or clan, have a headman and council of elders. They preside over caste meetings, direct the policies of the community, settle disputes, punish offenders against the caste rules. It is alleged that in modern time the control of the caste council over the members is declining, the reason being that—as some say—the elders are corrupt, or—as others complain—the younger generation is no more willing to obey and there is no possibility to force them to obey.

The endogamous sub-sections of this lowest of all low-castes, are not without a certain social gradation. Within the scavenging caste some sections are superior to others, and the social status is determined according to the origin of the section, claiming a former higher rank, or according to the type of work a particular section is doing. The lowest place is generally occupied by those sections which carry night-soil. The highest sections have given up scavenging entirely, and have adopted other occupations, such as leather work, weaving, or farming. Thus we see even those castes that are entirely outside the community of castes, are very much influenced by the Hindu caste spirit and grade themselves according to the same principles generally valid among the true Hindu castes. Thus even the so-called outcastes or 'Exterior Castes' have established a hierarchy of their own, though it might be completely ignored by the higher castes who may treat all the scavenging castes alike—as impure, polluting outsiders with whom they want to have no social contact though they accept their services and, indeed, are dependent on their services.

Among those lowest scavenging sections which remove nightsoil there is still a distinction: those who serve in private houses consider themselves higher than those who clean public latrines. It should not be forgotten that this type of work has to be carried out in urban environment and in villages where the women are not permitted to leave the house, even were it for a call of nature.

Each of these sub-sections has its own rules and regulations as to what work is permitted and when the line is to be drawn. Some do not touch nightsoil, but do all the other scavenging work in the

villages, including the removal of dead animals and refuse. Other sections work as porters, or play drums and other musical instruments for the villagers; again others have become sweepers of the roads, farm labourers, watchmen, cane labourers, even domestic servants, tanners and leather workers or weavers.

In the west, where the caste of sweepers seems to have the lowest status, the sweeper will handle a corpse, kill a stray dog, and act as hangman. Further east, the scavenger caste refuses these services, and they are carried out by other castes, by the Doms, or Mangs, for instance.

Sweepers readily admit outsiders of whatever caste into their community for some serious offence, with no chance of reconciliation. Usually some ceremony is performed to seal the admission; a man eats and drinks with sweepers, or drinks a glass of sherbeth in which a few drops of his blood are poured, together with the blood of one of his new caste fellows, or he is splashed with water in which a sweeper has taken his bath. A woman is admitted simply by marrying a sweeper.

In northern India many scavengers have abandoned the Hindu religion to escape the curse of untouchability, and joined other religions, Islam, the Sikh religion or the Christian Faith. But if they carried on their traditional occupation this change of religion helped them little. Though the followers of these three religions reject the caste system and untouchability and profess the equality of all men, they have not been able to overcome their aversion to sweepers and also discriminate against them. And the sweepers too feel greater solidarity towards their own community than towards their religion. Thus a Hindu Chuhra will readily marry a Chuhra girl who is a Muslim or Christian, and vice versa, while they are reluctant to marry a mate of the same faith, but outside their caste.

In the Himalayan hills the Dumnas or Domras, Dums (in Chamba), are the scavengers and field labourers in the villages. They also work in bamboo, making sieves, winnowing fans, mattings, grass ropes and strings, and generally manufacture all the vessels, baskets, screens, furniture and other articles which are ordinarily made of bamboo.

Their social rank is low and they are classed with the scavenging caste. Those Dumnas who have abandoned scavenging, call themselves Bhanjras. They seem to be of tribal origin, but have lost their independence and original culture with the influx of communities of

a superior culture against whom they could not prevail.¹

In Nepal there are three sweeper castes: the Pores, who are at the same time fishermen; the Chamis, and the Halahulas. The Pores are the most numerous of the three castes.

In the Punjab the Chuhra does the scavenging which elsewhere the Chamar has to perform. And though the latter may do similar work, he definitely keeps aloof of the sweeper whom he calls Bhangi. In the Punjab the Chuhras are numerically and economically one of the most important castes. The Chuhras are only exceeded in numbers by the Jats, Rajputs and Brahmins. They provide the main labour force for agriculture in the Punjab.

But in the eyes of the Hindus they occupy a very low social position, lower even than the vagrant Sansis and the gypsy Nats. And though some sub-sections have tried hard to improve their social rank by adopting the occupation of a slightly superior caste, they have ever been driven back to the bottom of lowliness either through their own poverty or through the oppression of the superior castes.

For their traditional occupation is scavenging, sweeping the houses and streets cleaning the stables of, carrying to the fields and distributing manure, and in cities and village houses where women are strictly secluded, removing nightsoil.

They alone of all castes keep and rear impure animals like pigs and fowls and they, with the leather workers, eat the flesh of animals that have died of disease or by natural death.

Together with the lowest jungle tribes they are the traditional workers in grass and reeds, from which they make winnowing fans and other articles used in agriculture: and like them they eat jackals, lizards, tortoises and pigs. Many of them have abandoned scavenging and taken to leather work and even to weaving, and by doing so have mounted one or even two steps in the social grades. As weavers they pass even the leather workers. But to secure the full benefit of this change of occupation they must relinquish the habit of eating carrion.

In the past it was generally believed that the Chuhras were of aboriginal origin though their racial appearance does not furnish any proof for this. The Chuhras do not show any marked difference in their physique from the other and higher castes of northern India.

The Chuhra is one of the village menials proper, who receives a customary share of the harvest and performs certain duties. He

¹D. Ibbetson, 1916/1974.

sweeps the houses and village, collects the cowdung, pats it into cakes and stacks it, works up the manure, helps with the cattle, and takes them from village to village.

News of a death sent to friends is invariably carried by him, and he is the general village messenger. He also makes the winnowing fan, and the grass thatch used to cover carts and the like. In central Punjab he adds to these functions actual hard work at the plough and in the field. He claims the flesh of such dead animals as do not divide the hoof, the cloven-footed belonging to the Chamar. But his occupations change somewhat with his religion: there are Chuhra who are Hindu, others who are Muslims and a third group has been converted to the Sikh faith.

The Hindu Chuhra profess and practise the Hindu Faith, and venerate mainly three spiritual leaders, Bala Shah, Balmiki, and Lal Beg.

Though a change of religion has benefited the Chuhra little, as stated previously, it did have some effect on them: The Sikh Chuhra, for instance, call themselves Mazbi or Rangreta. The Mazbis take the *Pahul*, wear their hair long, abstain from tobacco, and apparently refuse to touch nightsoil. But they perform all the other tasks hereditary to the Chuhra. Though they want to be good Sikhs, so far as religious observance is concerned, the taint of hereditary pollution is upon them; and Sikhs of other castes refuse to associate with them even in religious ceremonies. Mazbis often intermarry with the Lāl Begis or Hindu Chuhra. But their great *guru* is Teg Bahadur, whose mutilated body was brought back from Delhi by Chuhra for which service the Chuhra were then and there admitted to the Faith as a reward for their devotion. But the gratitude of the Sikhs was not strong enough to conquer their caste prejudice; the Chuhra were never accepted into the Sikh community as equals.

Though low castes, the Mazbis were admitted into the British army and made excellent soldiers.

A sub-section of the Mazbis are the Rangretas, mainly found at Ambala, Ludhiana and the adjoining districts. They consider themselves superior to the rest of the Mazbis, probably because of their reputation as former notorious highway robbers. Another reason is that the Rangretas have now generally abandoned scavenging for leather work. This would at least in their own eyes account for a claim to superiority. But the higher castes will recognise this claim only after they have forgotten the original caste status of the Rangretas.

In the hills Rangreta is often used as a synonym with Rangrez, Chipka or Lilari, names signifying the cotton dyer or stamper. In Sirsa Rangreta is a honorific title used by the Sikhs for a Chuhra or Mazbi.

A scavenging caste is also that of the Dhanaks, more to the east of the Chuhra habitat, in the Ganges valley, but still in the Punjab. They are probably identical with the Dhanuks still more to the east, nowadays mainly field labourers. In the Punjab the Dhanaks still do the same work as the Chuhras, though they stop at touching night-soil. Many of them have taken to handloom weaving. Still their social status is low, and even the Chuhras look down upon them. They eat the leavings of most of the castes, but not of Sansis. Brahmins refuse to serve them in religious worship.

The Balmikis, a Sanskritic category in which are included the major scavenging castes, are fairly well distributed in the United Provinces, but their major concentrations are in the Meerut and Agra divisions and parts of Rohilkhand Division. They are a small minority in the hill districts (migrants from the Rohilkhand districts) and in eastern parts, the Doms and Helas are associated with scavenging.

Their non-scavenging, non-traditional occupations, which have been classified under 'other services' need be studied. The Balmikis constitute 2.88 percent of the rural Scheduled Caste population, but 14.2 percent of the urban, being a homogeneous occupational category in the urban area, the bulk of them employed under the municipal bodies as scavengers. The Balmikis have been organised under Trade Unions, but their representation in the State's political structure is very weak.

The Bhangis, another sweeper caste of northern India, rank very low among the Harijans of this region. The male sweepers clean the public places and roads; a few serve as drummers. They also remove all dead animals, except cattle, from the village. The sweeper women are employed by the farmers to remove the dung from the cattle shed, sweep the courtyard and, where women are kept in seclusion, to remove the nightsoil. This is also their work in the towns and cities. The sweepers are paid in kind twice a year, but the sweeper women go to the houses of their patrons and collect daily some food, usually wheat cakes. Women of the Bhangi caste also act as midwives for the women of higher castes. However, midwifery and cattle-shed cleaning are also performed by Chamar and other Harijan women.

Bhangis are untouchables who must reside outside the village; their

touch is polluting the caste Hindus. But they, in turn, keep aloof from certain impure castes, like the Chamars and weavers, from whom they do not accept cooked food and water.

In Rajasthan the scavengers are also called Bhangi; they claim descent from Rishi Balnegji who was created from a hair of Vishnu. He had to carry away the leavings of the Pandava brothers after a solemn sacrifice (*yajna*). Others say that the Rishi did not do the work himself but assigned the task to other people whose hereditary occupation became from that day scavenging. Still others derive the name 'Bhangi' from *bhāng* (hemp) because scavengers use to take the drug before cleaning starts to dull their aversion against this type of work.

The Bhangis of Rajasthan are assigned either to a whole village or only to certain families whose courtyards and latrines they have to clean. Nightsoil must be removed only in villages where women are kept in seclusion (*purdah*), and are not allowed to leave the house. In other villages all go for a call of nature to the fields or a waste place outside the village.

The sweepers are paid either monthly or at harvest time when they receive their wages in grain.¹

In various urban centres as at Jodhpur, for instance, Bhangis have repeatedly tried to improve their social position by refusing to remove nightsoil, to eat the leavings of other people and to remove dead animals, but the economic situation of the sweepers is such that their very survival depends on this occupation and on the replenishment of their food through eating the leavings of other people and the flesh of dead animals. Only sweepers in certain government employment can afford to adapt themselves to the ritualistic taboos of the Hindu high-castes.

In north Gujarat the Bhangio is one of the principal village menials, and besides scavenging does most of the unskilled labour. In spite of the Rajput titles claimed by some sub-sections, this community is of old standing in Gujarat. It is the Bhangio, therefore, who points out the boundary; the sight of one of this caste carrying his basket is considered auspicious and before crossing the Mahi river in a flood, the blessing of a Bhangio was asked in the past for a safe passage. In this part of the country, as on the Ganges, the Bhangio is strict in his religious observances, but is only allowed, of course, to worship from

¹Shyam Lal, 1973, 37-42.

the outside court of the temples. As in the north, this caste has the provision and control of the village music at festive times.

In Bengal and north-eastern India in general, the chief sweeper castes are the Bhumalis (65,577 in 1961) and the Haris (321,941). The latter are also called Haddi or Sahi. Both castes are probably of the same racial stock, an aboriginal or Deltaic tribe of early settlement. The Bhumalis are found in the north and east of the State and in Assam, while the Haris reside in the west and centre of Bengal and in Bihar, and the Haddis in the south of Bengal and in Orissa. The Haris or Sahis have functional sub-sections in certain occupations. Thus the Mehtars remove the nightsoil, but do not sweep. The sweepers do not remove dead animals; others are musicians, palm juice tappers, grooms or porters. Musicians and porters stand highest, and often take to cultivation.

But in general the Haris or Sahis, as they are called in Manbhum, are one of the lowest castes of West Bengal. They are the scavengers of the villages and remove the carcasses of dead animals from the village lanes. Often they are also employed as village messengers (*gorait*). Their women serve as midwives for the higher caste women.

It is said that in the past the Haris took care of the horses in the household of the Bhumij chiefs and other wealthy landlords. With the disappearance of the horse the Haris lost this occupation. But they still have an almost kinsmanlike attachment to the horse; at least in former time they observed ritual defilement when a horse was born or died in their master's stable, and they underwent ritual purification.

Now they manufacture wooden combs and ropes of various kind from the bark of *Bauhinia Vahlia* (*chihar*) or of flax (*shan*). Rope-making is mainly done by women. The income from these trades is very small. They also work as field labourers.

Another sub-division of the Haris calls itself Kaora (117,000 in 1961 in West Bengal). They work as daily labourers, in domestic service, and supplement their livelihood by rearing pigs and preparing *gur* or unrefined sugar and molasses from the juice of the date palm.

Due to their connections with the Haris, the social position of the Kaoras is very low, though they have since long abandoned sweeper work.

In Bengal another name for 'sweeper' is Halalkhor, from *halal*, lawful, and *khordan*, to eat. Halalkhor signifies a man to whom all food is lawful. The traditional occupation of the Halalkhor (326) is sweeping.

They are mainly concentrated in the Purulia district and number only 326 individuals.

There are also Lalbegi sweepers in West Bengal. Their number was in 1961 only 845. They are supposed to have come from Upper India. They claim descent from a Muslim saint, Lal Beg. But they practise many Hindu customs, though in marriage they follow the Islamic law. They celebrate Diwali and Holi.

They work as sweepers and in some places also remove nightsoil. But they do not touch dead bodies.

Not only the Hindus, also the Muslims treat them as untouchables. Lalbegis are not allowed to enter the mosque nor can they enter a Muslim cemetery during a funeral.

But in the lowest section of the sweeper caste in Bengal is the Mehtar (23,577 in West Bengal) who has obviously borrowed his name from Upper India. He is the one who removes nightsoil.

Towards the south the village scavenging is increasingly done by some of the menial castes already mentioned, such as the Malas and Paraiyans. It will be found that, as elsewhere, endogamous sub-castes are springing up, separating the sweeping and labouring groups from those employed in municipal or private conservancy.

In Orissa the Haddis are such a caste. They numbered 91,819 in 1961. It has been suggested that their name derives from *haddi*, the latrine, or bones. For the Haddis collect, as one of their occupations, all sorts of bones and sell them.

The Haddis are divided into three endogamous sub-sections of which at present the Rellis (2,976) alone do sweeping work. Those among the Rellis who secured jobs as gardeners or field labourers regard themselves as the superior section. The Haddis proper refuse to do scavenging work; they engage in field work or do casual coolie work. They also live by selling fruit. They are the musicians for all Oriya castes except the lowest, the Khondras and Jaggalis, for instance. Haddis are a polluting caste and rank with Malas, Madigas and Paraiyans.

In Maharashtra the scavengers (Bhangis) who remove nightsoil live mainly in towns and cities. In the cities and bigger towns their work is largely mechanised, but in smaller places the removal of nightsoil is still a very dirty and unhygienic business, and hence even enlightened Hindus avoid any close social contact with them.

In religion about half of the Bhangis are Hindu, the other half Muslim. But often they mix both religions, reciting prayers from the

Koran while also worshipping the Hindu deities. They have a caste council which settles their disputes and imposes fines for misconduct. Most of the Bhangis earn their livelihood by keeping in their traditional occupation though a few of the younger generation have tried to break away from their caste and learn other trades. In the big cities and industrial centres they might have a chance to succeed in this.

Butchers and Meat Sellers

The professional butchers and meat sellers of northern India are the Khatiks. They have their major concentration in the Meerut Division and in the Varanasi and Azamgarh districts of Uttar Pradesh. They are found mainly in the urban centres of the north. Their literacy rate (9.51%) is higher than that of the Harijans in general—7.14%. The Khatiks are popularly associated with the occupation of butchers and mutton dealers. But 55% of the Khatik workers are engaged in cultivation or farm labour. In some regions, as for instance around Karnal, the Khatiks have taken to growing and selling vegetables and fruit.

Many of the Khatiks in northern India are Mohammedans. Their social position is low—between the leather workers and the scavengers. The Hindu Khatiks rear pigs and poultry. They also tan sheep and goats' skins.

Another butcher caste is that of the Qassab. He slaughters after the Muslim fashion, by cutting the throat of the animal, reciting the invocation: "In the name of God. God is great." This method of slaughtering is called *zibah* or *halal*. Without this ceremony a Muslim is not allowed to eat the flesh of an animal. The Qassab also dresses the carcass and sells the meat. Qassabs also trade in cattle. Their social status is very low; and they are notorious rowdies and easily become violent. Because of their meat diet, they are strong and hefty.

In central India the butchers (Kasai or Kasab) form two subdivisions: the Gai Kasais and the Bakar Kasais. The latter are often called Khatik, and are either Hindu or Muslim, while the Gai Kasais are always Muslim. They too have to perform the *zibah* or *halal*, when they slaughter an animal.

The Kasais are one of the lowest of the Muslim castes. They admit into their community even low-caste converts from Hinduism. They have retained many Hindu customs in their wedding ritual.

The more Hinduised section of the butchers in central India calls

itself Khatik. The name is derived from the Sanskrit *khattika*, a hunter or butcher. All over central India the Khatiks not only rear and sell pigs, and slaughter them for those who eat pork, but also grow vegetables in gardens and sell them in the market. They also tan and dye leather. They slaughter sheep and goats and sell the meat. Those who are Hindus usually do not butcher cattle; they leave this to the Mohammedan sections of the Khatiks and to the Kasais.

The social position of both the Hindu and Muslim groups is very low, after the leather workers, but above the sweeper castes. The various sections of the Khatiks are endogamous and some are higher than the others, especially the cultivating and vegetable selling sections regard themselves superior to the butchers. Some merely sell meat but refrain from butchering. Those who kill pigs are lower than those who only kill goats and sheep.

For the Hindus the occupation of the Khatiks is horrifying and most impure. They have to take a bath of purification if they by chance have touched a Khatik. But in modern times many high-caste Hindus may surreptitiously eat beef, especially those who go to foreign countries. But they would not dream of bringing beef home and cook it in the house. The women would strongly object to such type of food.

As most low castes, the Khatiks allow widow marriage and divorce. Their women are not punished severely for sexual offences; offspring from illicit liaisons are freely accepted into the community.

In southern India the same castes do the butchering, and meat-selling to the population. While in Orissa, Andhra, Kanara and Tamilnad beef eating is permitted only among the lowest castes and the Muslims and Christians, beef-eating is much more common in Kerala. Here even the higher Hindu castes, apart from the Muslims and Christians, may eat beef without loss of caste.



CHAPTER 6

Field Labourers

The rapidity with which crops come to maturity in the tropics and the shortness of time available for each harvest produce an urgent temporary demand for short-time labour. It is largely met by the temporary diversion to the fields of workers who during the rest of the year follow other trades. Thus temporary field labour is supplied first of all by the low castes in other kinds of village service. Such people, usually not fully employed in their traditional occupation, are always eager to work in the fields, as all castes consider agricultural work as an almost sacred occupation. Moreover, they usually receive their wages in grain and it is at this time that they collect what they require in grain for the better part of the year for their daily sustenance. Then, they are paid according to the work they do and men, women and children can earn much more in this time than during the rest of the year when daily wages for field labour are miserably low. There are also certain migratory castes which proceed from region to region in search of work, taking advantage of the fact that crops mature at different times in different places.

Here, however, only those castes will be discussed whose main occupation is field labour. There are such castes also. They form of course only a fraction of the castes which make their living in a more supplementary manner by field work. But even the normal demand for field labour is very great as India is still mainly an agrarian country and agricultural machinery is still widely absent. It has to be made good by manual labour.

Permanent field labourers were required also because certain land-owning castes, like Brahmins and various Rajput clans of higher rank were prohibited to do manual work. They would be degraded if they put their hand to the plough. Nor could their womenfolk help in field work as they were often secluded and not permitted to leave the house.

Such land-owning classes could in the past employ slaves and serfs. Thus they were assured of a permanent labour supply, even during the harvest and other busy seasons because slaves and serfs could be and were often rented out by their masters for work.

In pre-British time slavery was common all over India. Slaves were employed in various capacities, but a large portion of them were field slaves. The field slaves belonged to the land and could be sold with the fields. The wealth of the cultivator was generally estimated by the size of his fields and the number of his slaves.

The relations between master and slaves were generally somewhat distant, as field slaves were treated as untouchables whose nearness, let alone touch, defiled a high-caste man. Generally, they had to keep at a distance of thirty feet. If they met their master on a public road they had to get off the road and walk in the mud at the side. They could not enter a village or a market and had to shout a warning when high-caste men approached.

They were kept by their master on starvation rations and had no free time except on religious feast days. On such days the slaves received their rations in advance. Often enough they sold their rations partly to buy palm wine, and then all the members of the family had a good time. The master saw it his responsibility to provide funds for a wedding. He had to buy a nubile slave girl from another master for his slave boy. Not always was a wedding performed; on the order of the master slaves might be forced to live in temporary unions.

The master had to provide funds also for other occasions, in illness and famine; a prudent master looked after his slaves fairly well so that they could do their heavy work. For field slaves were kept busy all the time. Each family was allotted a plot of land which the slave had to plough; then he had to sow the seed, transplant the seedlings, irrigate the field, uproot the weeds, and guard the growing crops against men and animals even at night. At harvest time he had to cut the crops, carry them to the threshing floor, thresh and winnow the grain. After that he immediately had to begin to prepare the field for the second crop. The old, infirm and the children of his family looked after the master's cattle.

In South India slaves were even supposed to accompany their masters into war.

Officially slavery was abolished by the East India Company on April 7, 1843. A year before, in 1842, the Census of Malabar alone

recorded 139,000 slaves.¹ The British always felt uneasy about slavery and already in 1792 the year in which British rule commenced, a proclamation was issued against dealing in slaves. Yet even after the official abolition of slavery the implementation of the law remained widely a dead letter. In 1909, when E. Thurston wrote his *Castes and Tribes of South India*, he admits that slaves were bought and sold and hired out for work, although such transactions had to be kept secret, as the Penal Code, promulgated in 1862, had made slavery punishable.

Though slavery had been abolished, serfdom has persisted into present time. The habit of former slave castes and other low classes of borrowing money for any unforeseen emergency and the high rate of interest bind debtors to the lenders, and the landlords are always keen on advancing a certain amount of money to field-hands with the intention to have a steady labour supply, especially during the time when labour is scarce and the seasons demand it. Many field labourers are in the clutches of landlords and money-lenders for life and even for generations. It is bonded labour and nothing else, by whatever name it might be called.

However, not all landless field labourers of today had in the past been slaves. A number of castes, now mainly field-hands or casual labourers, had been employed in the armies of pre-British warlords either in the service of or against, the Moghuls and their satellites. They may have been soldiers or camp-followers and suppliers of food for men and animals. When after the imposition of British rule the continuous wars stopped, vast armies and even more camp-followers and foraging plunderers found themselves out of job. Not all of these people could secure fields for themselves or were able or willing to start cultivation. Many of them were forced to work simply as landless field labourers.

Some of these castes have retained a fairly high caste status and on the strength of their former army connections claim even Kshatriya rank. The high-caste Hindus usually do not acknowledge their claims, unless at least some of their caste fellows have been able to acquire and retain large estates. But those groups that belonged to the foraging part of the armies, and which often also later indulged in criminal activities, do not at present enjoy a good caste status.

¹D.R. Banaji estimates the number of slaves in 1843 to have been about 16 millions and probably more.

There are other groups of field labourers who once belonged to respectable castes, but through improvidence, misfortune or lack of enterprise and hard work lost their land and were forced into casual labour or permanent field service. These people too have largely retained their former caste status.

On the other hand, it was even in the past possible for some field labourers, by sheer thrift and hard work, to acquire land and become cultivators or at least tenants. This economic progress resulted not seldom in a rise of their social status. The section which had thus risen economically often severed its connection with the less fortunate and enterprising caste fellows and formed a separate group, often adopting a different name also. By improving its economic condition and by strict observance of the Hindu rules and regulations concerning food and social conduct this upper fringe of a servile caste was gradually and after generations able to attain a respected status in Hindu society.

Such a caste is certainly that of the Dhanuks, spread over the Jumna valley and north Bihar. In Bihar the Dhanuks are ranked with the minor landed classes, while in other regions their social status is low. This seems to suggest that the farmers among the caste are one of the group that has improved its status. In Bihar those who own no land are even employed in domestic service.

Their caste name, which means 'archer' suggests that they were once in military service and lost their occupation when wars stopped and permanent peace was restored during the British rule. As former soldiers turned field labourers they were classed as an impure caste. And in the Agra region they still act as village musicians, and their wives compete with the barber women for the job of mid-wifery. They eat carrion and the leavings of food from other castes a custom which makes them despicable in the eyes of orthodox Hindus.

The Arakhs are another such caste. They certainly belong originally to the impure Pasi caste. But some time in the past they acquired land in a valley which they were able to defend against the onslaught of the Rajputs escaping eastwards before the Moghuls. But in the 14th century the Arakh landholders were overrun by Muslim invaders and lost their land. Now they work as landless field labourers and village watchmen. But in the Pasi caste they still occupy the highest position, in remembrance of their former independent economic position.

Not all landless labourer castes have a low social status. It may well

be that in earlier times they had been land-owners who for one or the other reason had lost their land. Such a caste in Rajasthan seems to be that of the Dhakars who now work on the estates of the Rajputs, but nevertheless hold a fairly high social rank. This is the more remarkable because in general the field labourers in Rajasthan belong to the leather working and impure castes.

Apart from these rare exceptions, the bulk of the landless field labouring castes in north India generally, from the Punjab to the Vindhya mountains and even further south, belong to servile and impure castes. Of course, even these castes do not consider themselves on an equal footing; some claim to be higher than others and refuse to use the same agricultural implements, to drink from the same vessels, or smoke from the same pipes. They observe strict caste discrimination, though usually without much success, because their claims are not accepted by the caste Hindus who continue to treat them all as impure outcastes with whom they will not associate.

One such caste is that of the Bawariyas or Bauris (884,133 in 1961). Their main centre is in Bengal (West Bengal: 501,269), Orissa (250,914) and Rajasthan (83,104). But they are also found in the Punjab (41,770), in Uttar Pradesh and in Andhra where they are called Bavuri. It is a particularly varied community. Nothing is known of their origin, but their features and complexion suggest that they are of non-Aryan indigenous stock. In physical appearance the Bauris are distinctly separated from the other agricultural Hindu castes, even in the Punjab where they claim to have come long ago from Mewar and Ajmer.

The Bawariyas are sub-divided into a number of endogamous sections of various cultural and social standard. Those living in the eastern regions of the Upper Ganges valley claim to come from Baisvara and invite the Panvar Brahmins of their alleged former habitat to function as priests for them. They claim Rajput descent and have clan names which are the same with those of the Rajputs. But their dark complexion and different racial features do not allow to connect them genetically with their present neighbours nor even with the local hill tribes. The claim of Rajput descent is nowadays often made by Hinduised communities which want to rise in social rank and must not be taken serious.

Along the Jumna, however, and in Bengal the Bawariyas do not enjoy a high status nor do so the still vagrant sections and those inclined to foraging. In Bengal the Bauris are regarded as low castes

and accept food from the Bagdis, Kewats, Lohars and Kurmis. They are not very different from the Haris of Bengal and the Ghasis of Bihar. In education they are very backward.

On the whole they are fairly well Hinduised, though they mix the orthodox forms of Hinduism with some forms of worship of their own. They especially venerate spirits to whom they sacrifice goats and fowls. They engage in Bengal priests of their own community as no Brahmins will serve them.

At present they are mainly engaged in agricultural labour, but do any menial service and work also as palanquin carriers. In fact, this was in the past a common occupation for them. They freely admit members of higher castes into their community, but exact from each applicant a caste feast, or at least a ceremonial dinner for the whole community in the village.

There is a small caste called Ghasia (grass-cutter) which is probably a sub-caste of the Doms, but serves mainly the aboriginal tribes of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa as musicians at weddings and feasts, and performs menial works of all kinds. In 1961 the Ghasia caste numbered 55,034 individuals. Though the Ghasias observe the usual Hindu festivities, they also worship the gods of the tribes whom they serve. For this reason they are often considered an aboriginal tribe. But they are more likely related to the Dom caste or the Haris. Their women act as midwives and nurses in wealthy families.

The tribal people despise them as thriftless and consider them socially low as they live on the leavings or charity of other people. They are much addicted to liquor.

Among the Hindus, however, the Ghasias have entered private service as grooms and elephant drivers, or earn their livelihood as fishermen or field labourers. Some sections, like the Udias, cure raw hides and do the work of sweepers.

The caste keeps much to itself and, as low as it is, particularly avoids contact with the leather workers. But they also keep away from the Kavasths whom they regard as their enemies. They do not accept food or water from a member of the caste nor will they touch a Kayasth or serve a member of the caste.

On the whole, the Ghasias are desperately poor, as they are mercilessly exploited by their employers. It is therefore not likely that they will in the near future improve their social position.

There are many castes of landless field labourers and men of all trades with no ambition or energy to strive for a better social status.

One such caste in northern Uttar Pradesh, on the lower Himalayan slopes, are the Koltas, also called Kolis or Kois. The term 'Kolta' has become a by-word for serfdom. Till recent times they were 'owned' by the landlords, 'bought and sold and maintained on dole.' In fact, there are three types of Koltas: the first type, Khandit, is permanently attached to a particular Khasa family. A Khandit becomes practically a member of the family so that he has to shave himself in mourning if there is a death in the family. The second type is called Mundit or Mat, and he is heavily indebted to a Khasa. It will take him a life-time just to work off the high interest of his debt. The majority of the Koltas belong to this category. The third type is called Sanjayat, and these Koltas are unattached daily labourers. They are also employed as messengers to announce births and deaths.

The *Dastur-al-amal*, the local code, prohibits the Koltas from ever owning land. But they are granted small plots of land by their Khasa masters for their subsistence. And they are getting financial help for their weddings, birth and funeral feasts and in sickness.

The social status of the Koltas is low. They are untouchables. They cannot enter the temples, nor are they admitted to step over the threshold of a Khasa house. They should not enter the Khasa village with shoes on. Kolta women are forbidden to wear gold ornaments. Untouchability is however lifted on feast days when Khasas and Koltas sing and dance together. They celebrate the same feasts and perform the same rituals. Like the Khasas, the Koltas are polyandrous. The custom of polyandry has made it easy for Kolta girls and women to go and earn money as prostitutes in the cities of northern India. They are often infected with venereal diseases, tuberculosis and leprosy.

Still higher up in the mountains live the so-called Harijan Bhotias. They are not Bhotias, but are Harijans who have immigrated there from the lower regions. They are called Harijan Bhotias because they serve exclusively this tribe. They are the backbone of Bhotia economy, serving them in house and field when the Bhotias are on tour. They tend their herds, work their fields, tend the cattle in the stable and spin and weave in winter. In return the Bhotias give the Harijans their food and clothing, and help them to defray the expenses at weddings, birth and funeral feasts. This economic and social symbiosis has, however, now been thrown out of gear with the closure of the Tibetan border for all Bhotia trade. The Bhotias cannot support the Harijans anymore, nor do the Harijans want to live in this extreme dependence anymore. But during this transitional period the econo-

mically weaker Harijans are the main sufferers. Many are forced to migrate to the lower hills in search of jobs.¹

The very large population of Bengal has, as it is expected, a great number of large cultivating castes which are by far not all of high social status. Especially those of aboriginal stock had only with great effort and recently risen into the rank of the Hindu cultivating castes and been accepted by them. One of these cultivating castes is that of the Kaibarttas. They seem to have been the original residents of the Midnapur region, but later spread all over the Delta area, as their numbers increased. Originally a uniform community, they later split into a cultivating section, the Haliya or Chasa Kaibarttas and a fishing section, the Jaliya Kaibarttas. The rift between the two sections increased gradually. While for a long time the Haliya Kaibarttas gave their daughters to the Jalia Kaibarttas in marriage against a high bride-price, but did not accept girls of the Jaliya Kaibarttas as brides, later all links between the two sections were severed. In present time the Haliya Kaibarttas are, due to their exclusive occupation with agriculture, a respectable cultivating Hindu caste. But the Jaliya fishermen are of low rank and are listed among the Scheduled Castes. Some of the large landholders among the Haliya Kaibarttas claim even Rajput rank.

The Kewats, another cultivating caste of Bengal and Bihar, seems to be another sub-section of the Kaibarttas. They too are now a respected Hindu caste, while their physical appearance betrays their racial connection with the Kaibarttas.

The Chasa Kaibarttas have even abandoned their old name and want to be called Mahishya, a caste which according to Manu springs from a Brahmin male and a Kshatriya female ancestor. This designation is acrimoniously disputed by the higher castes of the region. In Orissa some Kaibarttas have joined the Khandaits, a land-owning caste of former military ambitions.

A similar caste found mainly in the vicinity of Calcutta, with a higher cultivating and a lower fishing section is that of the Pods or Poundras. Some of them have even become goldsmiths, others only blacksmiths, or carpenters and the like, but their main occupation is farming. Their number is given as 875,525 in the Census of 1961.

Though still listed among the Scheduled Castes, the Pods now claim Kshatria status, pretending that they are descendants of a

¹A. Hasan, 1971.

Kayasth father and a Napit mother. Though their social aspirations are by no means acknowledged by the higher castes of Bengal, their social position has already much improved. This is no doubt due to their main occupation as farmers and their strict observance of the Hindu regulations concerning food and social behaviour. They are by religion partly Saivites, Saktas or Vaishnavas.

Another caste, engaged in agricultural service, is that of the Bhogtas (987 in 1961) in West Bengal. Socially they are very low. They might be of tribal origin. According to Risley they are a sub-section of the Bhuiyas, or perhaps of the Kharwars or Rajwars. They worship some gods of their own, and do not care for their incorporation into Hinduism.

The Bhuimalis (39,181 in 1961), on the other hand, seem to have come up from the sweeper caste of Bengal, the Haris. One section of them, the Chotobhagiyas, still work as sweepers and in some places even remove the nightsoil. But the Barabhagiyas work as cultivators, palanquin bearers and musicians; they do earth work, repair roads, plaster houses and erect platforms for the village shrines.

They are very anxious to be treated as Shudras, but the Hindus still force them to live on the outskirts of the Bengal villages. They have adopted orthodox Hinduism and especially venerate Krishna. In some places they refuse to eat pork. Since the beginning of the last century they have given up interdining with the Chandals.

The Bhuimalis are served by degraded Brahmins, but barbers and washermen do not serve them. Their services are carried out by members of their own caste.

They observe caste endogamy and clan exogamy.

An equally low Bengal cultivating caste is that of the Doais (14,191). They also go under the name of Patidas. By religion they are Vaishnavas. Though their social status is very low, Patit Brahmins officiate in religious ceremonies for them. According to Risley, they belonged originally to the Bajanga caste, but broke away from their community and became Hinduised. They refuse to catch fish for sale and prefer to earn their living as boatmen.

But the largest and really dominant cultivating caste in eastern Bengal is that of the Chasas or Namasudras. Manu called the Chandals the lowest and most degraded section of human society. If this was true in Manu's time their social position has much improved in modern times.

The Namasudras are now, although still a Harijan caste, an im-

portant cultivating caste. In West Bengal alone they numbered 729,057 individuals in 1961. But they have also other occupations. Some are shopkeepers or traders, others carpenters and quite a few teachers. They are strict in the observance of orthodox Hindu rules and regulations. Fishing is a forbidden occupation for them, except for domestic use. They are split into numerous endogamous sub-divisions.

In the past they were forced to employ for their religious celebrations a special class of degraded Brahmins, and only members of their own caste would serve them as barbers and washermen. This is no more so in modern time.¹

It appears that due to their degraded position in the past many Namasudras converted to Islam. That several million Namasudras are still in the Hindu fold is due to the reform movement of Chaitanya in the 16th century. He preached equality of all men before God and introduced the system of communal worship of God with devotional songs (*Kirtans*) in which the Namasudras too could take part. But the Brahmin leaders of Hindu society looked askance at this mingling of castes and tried to suppress the Namasudras. They did not, however, succeed in breaking the spirit of the Namasudras who found consolation and confidence in the Vaishnava Faith.

Another important, but much lower cultivating caste of Bengal is that of the Bagdis (1,096,885 in 1961, forming 15.9 percent of the total Harijan population of the State). The Bagdis are widely distributed over all the districts of central Bengal.

They are a cultivating, fishing and menial caste of central and western Bengal. Dalton describes them as the remnants of an aboriginal tribe which intermarried with low caste Hindus and subsequently lost their identity. They became fishermen and palanquin bearers, giving up their tribal customs and becoming Hindus. They are divided into several endogamous sub-sections formed of exogamous clans inherited from their tribal ancestors.

At present the Bagdis are engaged in cultivation, fishing, and earth-work. They also work as masons and porters. Their religion is a mixture of orthodox Hinduism and spirit worship. Their favourite sacrificial animal is the fowl which they sacrifice on many festive occasions. Their social status is very low; they rank with Bauris and Bhuiyas.

In middle India, on the Deccan, there is one caste that carries out

¹N. K. Dutt, 1965, II, 146-156.

the same functions; it is the Mahar caste. The Mahars extend from the Arabian Sea coast in the west to the Bastar Plateau in the east. They are a varied caste and may have originated through a mixture of the indigenous population of the southern part of central India with the Proto-Australoid element from the south. They are certainly earlier settlers in the Deccan than the Maratha peasantry now dominating them and owning the land. The Mahars are relied on by the Marathas for their exact knowledge of the boundaries, and for their influence with the goddesses of cholera and smallpox.

The caste, being impure, has its own priests, but near the larger towns the Mahars are able to employ the services of Desasth or local Brahmins. But this is a modern practice, introduced since their increased employment on railways and large public works provided them with comparatively high wages. In the more backward areas the Mahars are still kept at a safe distance and not allowed to come close to the temples and forbidden to listen to the recital of the sacred texts.

The Mahars are, as a rule, labourers of all kinds and accept any work offered to them, except that of sweepers and leather-workers. Some have become soldiers and in the time of British rule there was even a Mahar Regiment. But the bulk of them still do field work. In recent times, through the inspiration of Dr. Ambedkar, there was an awakening in the caste and they now aspire to an improvement of their economic and social position. Here and there they have become rebellious against the caste Hindus who often try to suppress and hold them down with brutal force.

The large caste of the Dheds is doing the agricultural work in Gujarat. But they seem to be recent immigrants into their present habitats. They are from Rajasthan and were in the past weavers of coarse cotton goods. With the introduction of textile factories they lost their livelihood and are now forced to work as daily labourers. North of the Narbada, the families of this caste are attached to the estates of the larger Kunbi or Rajput landholders by whom they are supported. In the south a special sub-caste has been formed doing domestic service in the big cities like Ahmedabad and Bombay. On account of their adaptability and thrift their economic condition has improved. They are credited with great orthodoxy and zeal in carrying out their religious duties and in observing the social rules of Hinduism. Still, Brahmins refuse to conduct their religious rites and they have to engage priests of their own caste. They belong to the impure castes. They have caste councils which enforce strict discipline.

Further south on the west coast, especially in north-west Mysore State, there is a similar caste by the name of Haslar or Hulsavar. The members of this caste are also impure and have to live on the outskirts of towns and villages like the Mahars and Chamars. But they consider themselves slightly superior in rank to the Mahars and are on an equal footing with the Mukris, though lower than the Halepaiks. They have totemistic clans (*bali*) which are exogamous. They are divided into two endogamous sections.

The Mukris (5,260 in 1961), just mentioned, are also a caste of mostly landless field-labourers. They also produce shell lime. They are hard-working and peaceful, but improvident, and very fond of liquor. Most of the Mukris are employed by Havig Brahmins in their spice gardens. Their masters use to advance them money so that they can be sure of permanent and reliable labour supply. For the Mukris feel obliged by their debts to work them off, often through generations.

The Mukris are of low social status, though not untouchables. They eat meat and fish. They do not employ Brahmins for their religious ceremonies, but have priests of their own caste.

But the main field-labouring caste of South Kanara is called Holeyas. The Holeyas occupy almost the same position as the Mahars and Dheds, except that they do not engage in any other occupation than farming nor do they weave to any great extent. But it is possible that the weavers among them have joined the Lingayat creed in which weavers are very numerous.

The Holeyas probably form a link between the mostly landless field-labouring castes of Maharashtra and Gujarat with the northern-most section of a population of cultivators on the west-coast of southern India. At one time they owned all the land, but later invasions of more warlike races occurred. The original peaceful population was conquered and enslaved and forced to work their fields now for the new masters. The names Holeyas and Puleyas as well as Paraiyas are in fact identical words. Until the present time these three castes form the backbone of cultivation in this area. (The name 'Holeyas' is derived probably from the Canarese *hola*, the field.). These castes were in pre-settlement times so closely identified with the soil, that their oath, recited with certain formalities and solemn assurances, was considered decisive in field boundary disputes.

At least in the hill regions, the Holeyas were slaves, some serving in the houses of their masters, but most of them on their fields. The

field-slaves could be sold with the land. Nubile slave girls were either sold to the owner of Holeyas boys for marriage, or allowed to form temporary alliances the offspring of which became the landlord's slaves. To keep them in complete dependence, the slaves were given daily rations in grain or cooked food, in very moderate quantities, a piece of cloth annually to cover their nakedness and on festive occasions a small amount of money or other presents.

Though liberated from slavery more than a century ago, the dependence of the Holeyas on their landlords continued in the form of bonded labour. Forced to borrow money from the landlord at high interest, they are bound to work it off, sometimes through generations.

The Holeyas are of dark complexion, middle-sized, muscular, with fairly regular features. In their dress and ornaments they resemble the Mahars.

Like the Mahars they are mainly landless field-labourers; they also remove dead animals, make sandals and do all kinds of service. They act as village watchmen and serve touring officials. In the Deccan they are musicians and singers, and are engaged in the weddings of Kunbis and other cultivating castes.

Socially they are regarded as impure. Until recent times the Holeyas had to keep at a distance from the village. Their settlements, called Holageris, could not be visited by high-castes. When a Brahmin tried to enter their settlement, they drove him out throwing cowdung at him. Tearing the dress of a high-caste man and shoving him out after tying some salt into the hem of his loincloth—to avoid the evil eye—was also in vogue.

The Holeyas are bound together by a strong community feeling; their caste council exercises a strict control over the members of the community. But as usual among the low castes, the marriage tie of the Holeyas is rather loose and divorce easy. Some sub-sections, however, which aspire for a better social standing, make divorce and widow remarriage difficult. They also abstain from eating beef, which the Holeyas have generally done all the time.

The Holeyas have adopted the religion of their masters, with a special emphasis on the cult of female deities, such as Mariamma, Yellamma, Kalamma etc. The witch doctor plays an important part in their lives. The Holeyas are known for their buffalo sacrifice which they perform annually for the benefit of the village community. These sacrifices are called Potraja.

In Andhra, the main caste of field labourers is that of the Malas.

It is believed that they are racially and culturally connected with the Mahars, but nothing definite is known about their past history. They also have a weaving section which in the west has severed its social links with the mother caste, while in the east the weavers form merely an endogamous sub-section. The caste employs its own priests, barbers and washermen, because their low social status forbids the professional caste to serve them.

In the south of India the landless labourers are particularly strong in numbers and assertiveness. Their relative positions are hard to define. They are neither racially nor socially uniform, but obviously belong to populations which have been subjected to conquest by various invading groups. It is also possible that they themselves came as immigrants in search of land or employment.

In pre-British times they were slaves who belonged to the land and were sold with the fields. They were entitled to a load of paddy or grain once a year at the harvest time. The wealth of the cultivator was generally estimated by the number of his slaves as in proportion to the area of land cultivated by them.

After the liberation of the slaves by the British, new opportunities opened up for them as many coffee, tea and rubber plantations were started in the hills and the planters paid liberal wages. The liberated field labourers went to the new estates. The result was that the economy of the low land suffered as there was suddenly a scarcity of field labour. The landholders were thus forced to adopt the tenancy system and to rent out their land to permanent tenants. Their income from the farms was naturally considerably reduced.

The field labourers of South India seem to have also a common name. Pulayan is the name of the main field labourer caste in Kerala. Contemporary records seem to have used the same name also for the Paraiyans in Tamilnad; the name Paraiyan must be comparatively recent, for in the standard Tamil dictionary of the 11th century this caste name is not yet used. Two other castes of field labourers, the Pallis and the Pallar, in South Tamilnad, have similar names, as also the Holayas in Kanara, also field labourers, for the Tamil *p* becomes *h* in Canarese.

The Pallis to whom the name Vanniyar was given by the Brahmins were once a dominant community under the Pallava dynasty, but were reduced to servitude after the invasion of the Vellalar. They are now mainly agricultural labourers, though some have acquired land of their own and others engage in trade. They occasionally employ

Brahmins for their religious functions, but their customs and rules are for the most part outside Hindu religion and culture. On the score of their former position they have, of late, put forward the claim of Kshatriya rank and demand the sacred thread, a claim which is met with strong opposition by the priests and caste people around them. It is said that in the right and left hand distribution of the castes in Tamilnad the men of the Pallis go to one side and the women to the other. Conjugal relations are suspended while the factions are in active opposition and are only resumed when peace is temporarily restored.

The Pallis are obliged to live in settlements apart from that of the caste Hindus.

The field labourers of Tanjore, Tiruchirapalli, Madurai and Tinnevely are called Pallan. In spite of the similarity of the name the Pallar have today no connection whatever with the Pallis. They live in the villages south of the Palli habitats. But the names of their sub-sections suggest that originally they belonged to the great Kurumba caste, and thus indeed had ancestral connections with the Pallavas and therefore also with the Pallis. In social status they are inferior to the Pallis. In the past they were prohibited from entering the Brahmin street, and they still observe this custom. Nor do they allow Brahmins to visit their quarters, in the belief that such a visit would bring them misfortune.

They are supposed to have as their ancestor a Shudra who had illegal intercourse with a Brahmin woman.

Until the middle of the 19th century Pallan women were not permitted to cover the upper part of the body. Only in 1859, after a heated agitation supported by the Christian missionaries, did the then Governor of Madras grant them the right to wear a cloth over their breasts.

The Pallans, though in the past they suffered all the indignities of untouchability like the Paraiyans, nevertheless always struggled with the Paraiyans for superiority. The fight was never decided in favour of one or the other caste.

The Pallans have great preference for the demon cults so common among the lower castes. They engage priests of the Velluvan caste who commonly officiate for the lower castes.

They are almost exclusively engaged in field work, in particular in paddy cultivation in flooded fields. They work on the land of the Vellalans and other castes whose slaves they were in the past and

practically still are. They are condemned to life-long hard toil in the fields of others, for a mere pittance, scarcely enough to still the pangs of hunger and to cover their nakedness.

In the past they were owned by individual families. A few Pallans still prefer to work on in this way for their masters who treat them with preference, take all responsibility for their welfare and give them financial assistance at weddings and funeral feasts and send them food during sickness. Hired labourers are not normally treated in the same manner. Such hereditary servants are paid daily in paddy which they prefer. A daily labourer may be paid daily in the same way, or monthly in cash.

There remains the great community of village menials of a type more pronouncedly impure than the castes just mentioned. Yet they rank above the tanners and leather workers generally, and also above the scavenging castes. The best known section of this group is called Paraiyan, Paraya or Pariah, in Tamilnad.

Like many other low castes, the Paraiyans too claim to have a past which they cherish. But at all events their social position is in present time very low. But low as they are, excluded from everyday communion with the caste Hindus, they no more will admit the 'polluting' presence of a Brahmin into their hamlet than the latter will allow the Paraiyan's shadow to fall upon his waterpot.

Some of the most celebrated and exclusive temples are thrown open to the Paraiyas on certain days of the year, and for the time they lord it over the Brahmins. At certain festivals again, especially those connected with Shiva or a local goddess, it is one of this caste who takes his seat alongside of the image in the procession, or ties the symbolic wedding thread round its neck. Until recently, when the custom began to wane, even the Brahmin, in a few tracts, had to obtain the formal consent of the Paraiyar to a wedding in his household, and similar customs have been mentioned in connection with the rites of other castes in the region.

In another direction, certain low but responsible offices on the village staff must be filled by Paraiyas, and when there is a dispute over the boundary, a member of the corresponding caste, who has to walk the line with a pot of water, his own son, or a clod of his native earth, on his head. All this tends, of course, to show that the caste was once a most important element in the population, older on the soil, in closer communion with the local deity, and influential beyond the conception of those who only know its condition today. As before

pointed out, its present name is comparatively modern, and in the earliest records available, before even the Pulayas are mentioned, the caste which, like the Paraiyar of today, was excluded from the villages, was called Eyinar and credited with the possession of hill-forts and considerable power, on the lines of the Dasyas of the Sukta period.

The sub-castes of the Paraiyas, which are very numerous, indicate the practice of most of the more reputable handicrafts, but the general tradition among the modern Paraiyas is that the caste was formerly engaged in weaving, and in an inscription of the 11th century, probably the earliest in which the name Paraiyar is used, it is sub-divided into the weaving and the ploughing sections. Some have derived the name from *Parai*, a drum, and a section does, indeed, act as the drummers of the right-hand. On the other hand, their great rivals, the leather-workers, blow the trumpet for the left, without being named 'trumpeters' after their performance.

In Tanjore district the Paraiyas remove and sell the carcasses of dead animals and watch over the cremation grounds at night.

The priests of the Paraiyans and Pallans are called Valluvan. They are certainly a sub-caste of the Parayans or Pallans, though they do not interdine and intermarry with them. Tiruvalluvar, the famous Tamil poet and author of the Kural, belonged to this caste. The Valluvan have a tradition that their ancestors were the offspring of a Brahmin father who had an alliance with a Paraiyan woman.

The Valluvans, unlike the Paraiyans, forbid the marriage of widows and even polygamy. All males above the age of twelve wear the sacred thread.

The Valluvans have the reputation of being experts in astrology. They also act as physicians, and are often consulted by all classes of people. In many villages the farmers give them each a handful of grain annually at harvest time. They also write charms for sick people, prepare horoscopes and make forecasts of good and evil. They determine auspicious days.

The Valluvans abstain from eating beef. Though they freely mix with the Paraiyans, they do not eat with them and never stay in the Paraiyan quarters.

Another important functionary of the Paraiyan caste is the Vettiyan. The duties of the Vettiyan are diverse: He goes round the rice fields and diverts the water-courses to the various fields, according to the rights of the landowners. He beats the drum for public notices and ceremonies. As a servant of the Government he carries the revenue

collected from the farmers to the treasury. The Vettiyan is in charge of the burial ground. He is also the grave-digger and officiates whenever a Paraiyan corpse is to be burned or buried. In some place he carries the pot of fire to the grave. He also plays a prominent role in a rain-making ceremony performed by the low castes. The Vettiyan plays a part in Paraiyan weddings.

The office of the Vettiyan village official is hereditary, and the holder of the office is entitled to some respect and to certain emoluments. In some places the Vettiyan was given some rent-free land. He also had the right to remove the dead cattle from the village, and in return to supply leather for agricultural purposes. The hides were also used by him to make drum heads and tom-toms.

In Kerala the agricultural slave caste is called Pulaya in the north and Cheruman or Cherumakkal in the south. While *cheruma* signifies 'sons of the soil' and *cherumakkal* 'little children' (to be cared for and treated as such), the word Pulaya is probably derived from *pula*, pollution.

They have a tradition of better, even dominant, days before the Nayars enslaved them on their estates. They were treated as parts of the land and were included by name in the sale deeds as such. Their progeny too, like calves and coconut trees, were the property of the landlord. The economy of Malabar rested entirely on this system of slave labour.

One of the relics of their former servile condition is the practice of still bringing their children to be named by their employers. They use their own priests in the propitiation of the rather malignant deities they worship. In many respects they follow the customs of the Nayars, such as inheritance in the female line in the north and in the male line in the south. The title Cheruman denotes, according to their own tradition, a probable origin in the Chera country. Their besetting weakness is drink.

In Malabar up to 1862 the Pulaya was actually a slave; after that he virtually continued to be a slave until modern times. He was attached to a particular plot of land, so much so that when the land was sold, the Pulaya went along with the field into the hand of the new owner. But in the past, a Pulaya or Cheruman could also be sold or rented out for work individually. If he wanted to marry, his master had to buy a wife for him from another slave owner.

Cherumar and Pulayas worship the local deities though they cannot enter a Hindu temple. They also venerate their ancestors in a

special manner and make offerings to evil spirits by whom they often get possessed.

The Pulayas and Cherumans are supposed to be the original settlers in Kerala. They have traditions of several ancient Pulaya kingdoms in the region. Obviously they were at some time conquered and enslaved by superior invaders, probably the Nayars. The date of this conquest is still unknown.

In present times the living conditions of the Pulayas and Cherumar have much improved. They are entitled to the ownership of land and its cultivation; they may approach any one and use public conveniences, and they may even enter Hindu temples. But though their slavery is a thing of the past, they are still economically and socially oppressed and greatly handicapped by the mental effects of their centuries-old slavery.

Another slave caste, in former Travancore State, is that of the Kanakkans. The caste is probably a sub-division of the Cherumans or Pulayans. The Kanakkans are divided into four endogamous sub-sections, one of which was working in the salt pans. Now they are employed as fishermen in the backwaters, as cutters of timber which they float down the rivers on bamboo rafts towards the sea, as boatmen, and as agricultural labourers. They also work on coconut plantations and in the coir industry.

They eat the food of the high castes, but refuse that of washermen, barbers and the like. But they themselves were treated as untouchables and had to keep a distance of 48 paces from the high castes. Even Ezhavas felt polluted by their touch, and Kammalans and Valans by their nearness.

They strongly believe in magic, sorcery and witchcraft, but do not practise these arts actively; they consult the experts of the black arts who are members of other castes. They worship the local Hindu gods, and have a special veneration for their ancestors.

The Kudans of Kerala are another such agricultural caste. They do all jobs connected with cultivation, such as sowing, ploughing, manuring, weeding, transplanting and the like. As soon as the monsoon is over, they work in gardens, turning the soil, watering and fencing.

They are in fact one of the slave castes of old, but are still not completely free, for they work under a landlord or farmer to whom they are indebted. Their daily wages consist of a certain amount of unhusked rice, more or less the same amount which they had received when slaves. For the Onam and other feasts they receive a double

amount of paddy, some salt, coconuts, oil and chillies. On the day of the village festival each worker receives a piece of cloth, the men a *mundo* (loincloth) and the women a *kacha* (wrap), and in addition some toddy and arrack and foodstuff for a festive dinner.

When they fall ill, they are looked after by their masters who do not want to lose cheap workers but also because they feel responsible for them. Whenever a landlord has more servants at his disposal than work in his fields, he may rent them out to other landlords, even for a whole year. He receives a certain amount of grain for their work.

If a servant should happen to run away, he is brought back by force or good words; should these measures fail, he is asked to pay off his debt. The Kudans have exchanged their slavery simply for bonded service, and as in the past, they still live in small huts and receive insufficient food, plodding on from day to day and getting deeper into debt from year to year, as their wages are too low for their most essential needs.

The Kudans claim to be superior in social status to the Pulayans, Paraiyans, Ulladans and Nayadis. In former times they had to keep a distance of 48 feet from high-caste Hindus. They feel polluted by the touch of Pulayans, Ulladans and Nayadis. They have barbers and washermen of their own caste. They had to keep far away from the temple precincts, and could approach it only on some special days. They worship the local Hindu deities, and have a strong faith in magic and sorcery. They perform ancestor worship.

CHAPTER 7

'Castes only Regionally Regarded as Polluting

1. Barbers

'Cutting the hair, shaving the beard, and paring the nails are important parts of the Hindu ceremonial. For these services men of the barber caste are employed. But the barber has to serve the villagers throughout the year regularly. In northern India the menfolk of the village expect to be shaved once in a fortnight, and their hair is to be cut once a month. Those with an English-style haircut get it once every six weeks or two months. At the same time the nails on the fingers and toes are cut and pared. The hair is plucked from nose and ears with tweezers and the ears cleaned with an ear-pick. At funerals the barber has to shave the hair of the whole body of the chief mourners. Women never cut their hair, except some old-fashioned widows. And they cut and clean their nails themselves. They do not require the services of a barber. If a widow is to be shaved, it is done by the barber's wife.

In former times shaving was done without soap, by just wetting the skin with water. And it is related that some barbers were so adept that they could shave a client while he was still asleep without waking him. There is an old Tamil proverb, "Go to an old barber and a new washerman." The barber has no special room for his work. He goes from one house to another and does his shaving on the client's veranda or courtyard, or wherever it is convenient. Barber-shops are found only in towns.

However, in traditional Hindu society the barber is more than a mere cutter of hair and beard. He also acts as master of ceremonies in many social and religious functions of a private or public nature. For lower castes or people who cannot afford the service of a Brahmin he may function as a priest. Often he arranges marriages, witnesses engagements, and plays an important role in the wedding

ceremonies, next indeed to the Brahmin. He is often the bearer of the wedding umbrella, or the musician in the wedding procession. He runs errands and sees that the necessary materials are ready for the more important ceremonies—betel, areca nuts, camphor, and the leaf plates for the wedding or caste dinner.

The barber is also employed as the traditional messenger, his head covered with a turban, a stick in his hand, formally announcing auspicious news, such as the birth of a child or a wedding, or inviting guests for celebrations and dinners. Barbers do not as a rule announce the news of a death; this is left to the sweeper. The barber is also supposed to accompany distinguished guests on their arrival or departure with a torch, when necessary. In the south the barber also acts as the musician at weddings and village festivities or temple ceremonies.

In past times the barber was also the only person in the rural areas with a knowledge of surgery (*jarrah*). Especially in the South barbers practised surgery and bone-setting. Nowadays their rather drastic methods of curing ailments are not much in demand, as proper physicians, dispensaries and hospitals are available. But in the remoter areas a barber might still be called to lance an abscess or bleed a patient by applying leeches. It is perhaps also this practice of surgery which relegated the barber to a low social rank.

The barber belongs to the low castes and is on the level of a washerman, though superior to a leather worker or weaver. His occupation is degrading because he not only cuts the hair, he must also pare the nails and clean the ears of his clients. And he pares the nails of a corpse before taking it for burial or cremation. It is particularly this service which renders him impure. He also shaves the chief mourner and pares his nails before he lights the pyre. After cremation he shaves all the mourners, his presence is also required for the oblation to the ancestors on the tenth day. In the time of the Buddha, according to the Jatakas, the barber (*nahapitaputta*) was an outcaste and socially of the same rank as the temple-cleaning Pukkasa. He was supposed to live outside the village.¹

The barbers are generally known as persons of great astuteness and the proverb says: "The jackal is the sharpest among beasts, the crow among birds, and the barber among men."

The barbers are generally very particular in the selection of their clients. Usually each caste has its own barber who attends to no

¹R. Fick, 1972, 323.

other. All over India the various barber castes shave only a limited number of castes, and many low castes must employ members of their own caste because the proper barbers refuse to attend to them. The latter would lose their clients of higher caste if they served all indiscriminately. As masters of ceremonies the barbers also refuse to carry out tasks which are inauspicious, like the announcement of a death. In most parts of India, however, the barber's wife acts as midwife or nurse after childbirth, and occasionally as hairdresser and manicurist to women.

The barbers are fairly evenly dispersed over India. Thus they have many territorial sub-divisions which are endogamous. Even in castes which have barbers of their own community they often have to marry within their own class because the other caste fellows refuse to marry barber girls or to give their daughters to barbers in marriage. For even within his own caste the barber takes a low rank.

In North India the barber is called *Nai*, from Sanskrit *napit*, barber, if he is a Hindu, or *Hajjam*, from the Arabic *hajam*, to cup, if he is a Muslim. The barbers usually share the religion of the people whom they serve.

In Kashmir, the barbers (*nai*) are classed with the lower castes, petty shopkeepers and porters, but they are not untouchables.

In the Punjab the barber is a true village menial, who shaves and shampoos the villagers, prepares tobacco for the village rest-house, and attends on the village guests and touring officials. He is the traditional messenger of invitations to weddings and other festivities. He is often a matchmaker, and attends engagements and weddings, and receives small gifts for these services in addition to the annual remuneration which is paid in kind and cash to him as to other village servants.

The position of the barber in the United Provinces is not much higher than that of the *Hārijans*. Nowadays barbers for the higher castes also serve the *Hārijans*, such as *Chamars*, though they use special razors and scissors for them. Each barber receives for his service per head twice a year six litres of grain. But a joint family pays only for three persons even if more have to be served. Unmarried boys need not pay any fee.

In addition to his service as barber, he also serves at weddings and funerals. At a funeral he shaves the chief mourner who has to light the pyre and pares his nails, and after cremation shaves the other men attending the funeral. He also attends the functions performed

on the tenth day after death. His wife attends to the village women in a similar capacity.

At Kashi barbers are the funeral priests for Doms and other untouchable castes whom no Brahmin may serve at cremation.

In Bihar, barbers are treated as clean Shudras. Caste people and even Brahmins accept water from them. Here too, the barbers are supposed, besides shaving the beard, cutting the hair and cleaning the ears and nails of their clients, to perform the usual ritualistic functions for castes socially superior or equal to them. They resent the traditional title of *hajjam* and want to be addressed as Thakurs. They claim Brahmin descent on the strength of their frequent employment in weddings and funerals and other festivities.

In Bihar the barbers have a rather efficient caste council, headed by a *sardar*. He is the local authority in caste matters of a village unit (*gaun*). An appeal is possible to a higher caste council comprising several villages. The *sardar* is assisted by an officer (*manjan*) and a messenger (*charidar*). All these offices are hereditary though an unfit candidate can occasionally be superceded.

In Bengal, the social status of the barber (*napit*) is that of a "good" Shudra. Ordinary Brahmins act as their priests without any objection. By changing their profession and adopting a new one, that of sweet-meat makers, for instance, and with the adoption of a new name (*Madhu Napit*), a number of barbers have formed a new caste which is superior in social status to that of ordinary barbers. The two castes have broken off any social contact with one another.

The barbers of Central India are treated with scant respect by the villagers. Like other low castes, they allow widow remarriage and divorce. A divorced woman may remarry. On the country-side the barber shaves his clients once in a fortnight and on other occasions when the ritual requires it. For such extra work he receives a small remuneration while for his regular work he is paid annually in kind during the harvest.

The barber plays an important part in the various religious and social ceremonies of the Hindu community. Usually he acts as an assistant to the Brahmin priest. For families which cannot afford the service of a Brahmin the barber often acts as priest as well. He is often used as go-between in marriage arrangements and makes discreet inquiries about the social and financial conditions of a suitor's family. He is feared as a scandal-bearer and gossip-monger. Thus he has considerable influence in village life, though in a more hidden and

underhand way.

In Maharashtra the barber are popularly known as Nhavis, obviously a corruption of the Sanskrit word *Napit*. Their hereditary occupation is shaving, hair-cutting and nail-paring. They are indispensable village menials and formerly enjoyed rent-free lands for their services. Even now village barbers are paid in grain at harvest time. Their services are required at many social and religious functions such as the first hair-cutting, wedding, death and funeral feasts. They also act as torch-bearers, messengers of good news, umbrella-bearers at weddings and as musicians. In former times, they also served water and in some places even food at festive dinners of the cultivating castes. They were also employed as domestic servants and cooks in wealthy households.

In the past the Nhavis were also the surgeons of the village people. They opened boils and abscesses and bled the patients by applying leeches.

The Nhavis of Maharashtra rank socially with the cultivating castes and call themselves Shudras while more in the south they are treated almost as untouchables. So that their name and trade are terms of abuse. Most Nhavi women practise midwifery for the higher castes.

The Nhavis resemble the Marathas in dress, food, speech, social organisation, religion and customs. They have adapted themselves well to the people whom they serve. While cutting the hair and shaving the beard of their clients, at least once in a fortnight, the Nhavis are able to discuss all the gossip of the village or town. This service was given free of charge.

Of the Nhavi or barber caste in Maharashtra many are Lingayats, a small number being Muslim. Like many other functional castes of the Deccan, the Nhavis too bear the same names, sur-names (clan names) and observe the same religio-social practices. This suggests that they are merely a functional section of the Maratha caste. The Maratha Nhavis have two territorial, endogamous divisions—the Maratha Nhavis in the Deccan and the Konkani Nhavis in the Konkan. The Konkani Nhavis are again sub-divided into the Konkani Nhavis proper and the Shindes or bastards. All these sections have exogamous clans called *kula* or *devak*.

The common title of the Gujarat barbers is Hajam. Like other low castes, they allow widow remarriage and divorce. They practise levirate. By religion they are Hindus, in spite of their name, and keep the usual Hindu fasts and feasts. Brahmins officiate at their religious

functions. They visit the usual places of Hindu pilgrimage.

Socially they have a low position. Though they do not serve members of the impure castes, the high castes, and in retaliation even certain low castes, do not accept food prepared by Hajams. Nor do high-castes use their pipes for smoking.

The Gujarati Hajams are divided into five main divisions which are endogamous and generally do not inter-dine. They are of different social status. Those of the highest rank, the Limbachias, claim Rajput descent. They worship the goddess Limach in Patan who is supposed to have saved them after a defeat. The goddess was responsible for their choice of occupation.

In Kanara the barbers are called Nayinda, but the term Hajam is also popular. The name Nayinda is obviously derived from the Sanskrit word Napita, barber, which in northern India has been shortened to Nai.

The chief occupation of the Nayindas is that of barbers. In Kanara they are also the professional village musicians. In former times they had in addition the function of surgeons, dressing wounds and setting bones. But in modern times this service is no more required and has been taken over by the medical service. But Nayinda women still act as midwives in the more remote villages.

Nayindas are usually attached to a certain number of families in the towns and villages whom they serve. These families give them an annual remuneration in kind and cash at harvest time and on festive occasions. As musicians the Nayindas perform in teams for the whole village. They are paid separately for these services.

There is a continuous dispute between the barbers and washermen who has precedence over the other. To avoid taking sides the high castes at public dinners usually serve them both at the same time. But the washermen refuse for prestige's sake to provide the canopy cloth at the wedding of a Nayinda, nor do they serve the wedding procession as torch-bearers. The Nayindas retaliate by declining to play music at the wedding of a washerman, nor do they pare the nails of the marrying couple. But on ordinary occasions these services are readily rendered.

The touch of a Nayinda is polluting for a Brahmin and also a member of other high castes. All caste Hindus, however, feel polluted after a shave and take a purifying bath and wash all their clothes. Shaving is an inauspicious operation as it is the duty to shave a corpse and later the widow. Women especially shrink from touching a barber, while men of course cannot avoid his touch at regular inter-

vals as also on numerous other occasions.

Nayindas eat meat and drink liquor. They accept food from Besthas and above, but from them only Holeyas and Madigas accept cooked food. Some sub-sections of the Nayindas forbid widow re-marriage and allow divorce only in case of adultery. They observe carefully the Hindu conventions so as not to lose their jobs. They do not dedicate girls to the temple service.

The barbers of South Kanara are called Kelasi. The word is derived from *kelasa*, work. The caste is divided into different endogamous sub-sections, according to the castes each section serves. If a barber serving members of a high caste operates on a member of a lower caste, he loses his caste and is ordered to pay a fine for re-installation. The untouchable castes are not served by the village barber; they have barbers of their own caste.

In South Kanara the village barber is inferior to the Bant, the potter, the weaver and the oilmaker, even to the musician. But he considers himself superior to the fishermen and the palanquin bearers, though the latter do not accept his claim.

In the villages the barber is essential for two ceremonies: at the name-giving ceremony he has to tie a thread around the waist of the child, and at the funeral he has to carry the fire to the pyre, though it is the son or nephew who lights the pyre.

The barbers of South Kanara have several legends to explain their origin and to give their calling a high social standing. And indeed, besides the ordinary service of shaving and hair-cutting, the barber has to perform important tasks in the various rituals which a Hindu has to undergo during life. Still, if the number of his clients is too small, as it may often happen in a village, though rarely in a town, the barber has to supplement his income by the cultivation of fields, or by daily labour.

The barbers of Orissa, in Ganjam District, are called Bhondaris. The name Bhondari is derived from *bhondaram*, treasure. For in times past the landlords handed the guardianship of their treasures over to the barbers who thus became important personalities. Thus the Bhondaris occupy a higher position in the caste hierarchy than their Telugu and Tamil counterparts. Though various Oriya castes bathe after being shaved, the touch of a Bhondari on other occasions is not regarded as polluting.

All over the Ganjam District the Bhondaris are employed as domestic servants, and some are engaged as porters, cart drivers, etc.

Others officiate as priests at Thakurani (village goddess) shrines, grind sandalwood or make flower garlands. On the occasion of ceremonial processions, the washing of the feet of the guests, carrying articles required for worship, and the clothes and jewels to be worn by the bridal couple on the wedding day, are performed by the Bhondari. Women of the barber caste are employed by the Karnams on the occasion of marriage and on other festivals, and their services are considered indispensable.

The barbers of Andhra call themselves Mangala. They claim to have a Brahmin as their ancestor who married a Vaishya woman; their offspring became barbers. Mangala means 'happiness' and also 'cleansing'. The barbers are thus called because they are the messengers of good news. They take an active part in weddings. They play the flute during the weddings. They hold a better social position in Andhra than the Ambattans in Tamilnad who shave the hair of the whole body, while the Mangalas shave only the upper part of their clients' bodies. But they also shave the heads of the mourners at a funeral. Their wives practise midwifery.

The Mangalas eat meat. They allow widow marriage. They are not a polluting caste as such; a barber is polluting only while he is actually engaged in his professional duties. Many barbers in Andhra are employed as store-keepers. The Mangalas are also supposed to serve touring officials, to accompany and guide them, massage their limbs when they are tired and render them other personal services.

The barbers of Kerala, the Marayar, attend mainly to the Nayar. But the more we approach the south of Kerala, we find barbers giving up their traditional profession and acting as drummers generally, and as Nayar priests at funerals. Still further down the coast, the work of shaving is altogether abandoned and left to a caste by name of Velakkatalavan, though they themselves want to be called Nayar.

In the southernmost part the Marayar have passed into temple service, drumming and the conduct of funerals. They call themselves Attikurichi or Ambalavasi. Under this transformation, they claim a social rank next to the Brahmins, and refuse to eat with Nayar. But no more will the Nayar eat with the Ambalavasis.

The barber is everywhere credited with a good knowledge of the outside world, together with quite a penetrating insight into all the secrets of the families in the village. This gives him a certain power over the village people as almost all of them have something to hide. Thus even the haughty Brahmin is ready to perform religious cere-

monies for the barber. He also gets his fees on many occasions, and often special presents, feast offerings and an annual share in the harvest of each landholder. Thus barbers are often quite wealthy.

Among the Moplahs of Kerala, the barbers are called Ossan. By virtue of their calling they occupy the lowest rank in Moplah society. Their womenfolk act as hired singers on social occasions like weddings. The male barbers cannot marry any Moplah woman of higher status, though a barber girl may marry a man of the next higher rank, a Pusalar. At social functions the barbers are segregated and served separately, but there is no implication of untouchability, only of distinction.¹

There is another barber caste in Kerala, called Kshaurakan, a corruption of the Sanskrit word *ksharaka*, a barber. The Kshaurakas are not only the hair-cutters and surgeons of the village people, but act also as masters of ceremonies in their rituals. Thus among the Vellalas the barber directs the ceremonies of weddings and funerals, and other festivities in the village. In place of the Brahmin, he ties the marriage badge (*tali*) around the neck of the bride. This service cannot be dispensed with.

The barbers of Tamilnad are called Ambattan. The word is usually derived from the Sanskrit *amba* (near) and *shtha* (to stand), i.e., he who stands near to shave his clients. In the past the barber also served as a surgeon (*maruthuvar*). The wives of the barbers were, and in remote regions still are, the midwives of the Hindu community. For these services they are said a meagre remuneration in the form of food, uncooked rice or paddy.

It is said that according to the law of Manu, the barber is a 'good Shudra'. His touch is not polluting, but the act of shaving is. Thus Brahmins officiate at their religious feasts but the Brahmin must take a bath after the function, having been defiled for entering a barber's house.

But the Tamil barbers complain, according to a newspaper report of April 1979, that they are still forbidden to enter the houses of the caste Hindus, and in certain rural areas they are not allowed to wear shirts. If a barber refuses to perform ceremonies for a caste Hindu family in a village his whole family might be driven out. The barbers are not allowed to draw water from the public wells and tanks, or their huts are set on fire.

¹cf. V.D 'Souza, 1973, pp. 50-53.

At present there are about two million barbers in Tamilnad. Twenty thousand educated young men of the community are jobless, because up to now the barbers have not been included among the Scheduled Castes and thus they do not enjoy their privileges.

2. *Potters*

Pottery is a very ancient craft. It produces articles essential for the most elementary needs of the people—for storing water in a tropical country, for cooking, eating and drinking purposes. Pottery has many other uses too, and in some parts of India pottery was used in the past even for the burial of corpses, or at least of bones.

No wonder, then, that all over India the potter is one of the recognised village servants, and receives his annual share in the harvest. For this he is obliged to provide all the earthenware vessels required for domestic use. His wares are so fragile and so liable to pollution that they must be constantly replaced. Orthodox Hindus may not use vessels again from which a stranger or a member of a lower caste has taken his food or drink. While food is often served on leaf platters, drink is served in clay vessels which can be thrown away without much loss. It is the potter's duty to replace them. Thus each year he has to supply several large pots to the villagers who are his clients, and he must supply pots on certain festive occasions, for weddings, funeral feasts and caste dinners. On such occasions he is also supposed to fetch the drinking and washing water to the houses of those clients who can drink from his hands.

Owing to the fragility of the wares and the difficulty of transporting them, the industry is spread all over the country. Almost every village has a potter or several of them. The pottery craft is normally handed down from one generation to the other. It is a family occupation; women and children too must help.

The potter's trade can be traced back to the Vedic Suktas. In olden days earthenware vessels were much more in demand. The potter made the oil lamps (*diyas*), often just little saucers, but sometimes more elaborately and even artistically fashioned. He made the water pots (*gharas* and *surahis*), now also flower pots and jars. All kinds of cheap toys were produced by the potters.

In the past, pottery was developed to a high standard. Already the Mohenjodaro culture had a high quality pottery and produced an amazing variety of articles of high quality and artistic value. In

Moghul times the blue pottery of Khurja and Jaipur was justly famous, and also the low temperature glazed pottery of Chunar and Karigari, the Nizamabad black shining pottery of Krishnagar. Most of these traditional arts have died out.

The Khadi and Village Industries Commission has made attempts to revive the ancient arts and thus help the potters to retain their ancient calling. The Commission has met with sporadic success. The jugs, mugs and tea-sets in the underglazed, marbled effect porcelain of Pappinissery in Kerala are much in demand. The stoneware jars of Bhadravati and Sewapet in Tamilnad sell well. The insulators, mortars, and porcelain bottles of Delhi, the crockery of Pinjore in Haryana, Sewapuri and Nagla Akhoo in Uttar Pradesh, find many buyers. Also in Mysore State is artistic and glazed pottery produced for sale in the Emporia. But all these are isolated enterprises and their impact on the potter caste as such has been almost negligible.¹

In modern times the work of potters is less in demand, as earthen vessels have largely been replaced by more durable metal ones, by brass, aluminium, steel and plastic wares. The fear of pollution is also lessened. Only in those districts where irrigation by the Persian wheel is still in use the potter is still indispensable: he has to supply the little jars which are constantly breaking. Or he makes bricks and tiles.

Since the competition of the metal, aluminium and plastic ware industry puts many potters out of work—their number is about 1.5 million—the potters in increasing numbers have to look for other employment. In northern India many potters become mechanics or field labourers while women find employment in factories.

The status of the potters—Kumhars, Kumbhars, Kunwars—is above that of serfs, but it is undoubtedly low. The reason given for this low status of potters in the caste hierarchy is their use of the donkey. The donkey is regarded as an impure animal. But some sections of the potters now use a bullock for the transport of their wares, and they consequently claim a status higher than that of the other sections still using the donkey. Those who work on the wheel also feel higher to those who use a mould or make images. Such sections do not intermarry. Sub-sections of the potters that rear pigs are also regarded impure for this reason.

Other sub-sections are merely territorial and bear the name of the towns or regions from which their ancestors came. But usually they

¹Veena Sandal, 1976, pp. 19-23.

have some specific feature which distinguishes a section from the other and which seems to give them a claim to slightly superior rank or lowers their status.

In northern India the potters, though of low caste, belong to the clean castes and rank with the Bards. They have a firm position in the *jajmani* system of the village. They supply to the cultivators earthen pots of varying sizes and are paid in kind twice a year. On special ceremonial occasions and on big feasts they supply a great number of earthen plates and cups to the diners for which they are paid extra. The potters keep a few donkeys for the transport of earth, pots and dung fuel. They have customary rights for collecting the dung of cattle from the grazing grounds. They also carry goods of all kind for the villagers against proper payment.

The potters (Kumhar) in the Ganges valley, for instance, often stay in the quarters of the Pasis. Where their trade has declined, owing to the import of cheap metal or enamel ware, they have taken to agriculture. In social rank they are below the artisans like blacksmiths and carpenters, and highcaste people do not accept cooked food nor water from the hand of a potter. Nor do barbers accept food prepared by a potter.

In Bengal the potters seem to enjoy a slightly higher social position, but so do the weavers and oil-pressers too. In the Deccan and South India the Kumbhars or potters have twenty-three endogamous subdivisions; some of them have come, as their names indicate, from Gujarat, the Konkan or other places. The Gujarati Kumbhars often wear Rajput clan names and some of the clans claim a Rajput as their ancestor. In Madras both Telugu and Tamil potters (Kusavar) like to wear the sacred thread of the twice-born, and in some regions are indeed served by Brahmins, while in other places this privilege is refused them.

The brick-makers also belong to the potter caste. To build up the kiln, they use the sweepings of the village and fields and other refuse for fuel. This may be an additional reason why the caste of the potters is socially low, though they are very careful not to touch the lowest kinds of filth and thus escape the degradations of the sweepers.

During the rains when the potter's work rests, they often do field-work. Their donkeys are employed in transporting grain and other commodities during that time.

The articles which the potters produce are first of all the round pots which the Indians use for storing water. They are of various

sizes. But they also manufacture larger pots for storing grain, flour and vegetables. The Hindi name for such pots is *ghara*. Besides these pots, the potters make amphora-like water-pots, for which they mix salt and saltpetre into the clay to make them porous. The evaporation of the water keeps it cool. The potters also make a great amount of saucer-like vessels (*diya* or *diwani*) which are filled with oil, a wick is inserted and lighted. These lamps are still very common in the rural areas, especially for lighting lights in temples and at the Divali festival. Another very common article manufactured by the potters is the earthen pipe (*chilam*) which is widely used for smoking in the villages. In modern times the Kumhars also make small cups which are used especially in northern India for drinking tea or milk. If such are offered to members of different caste, they are after use simply thrown away. This is done also at the railway stations and in tea shops.

In the past the fear of pollution through using a less perishable cup than one made of clay has prevented the artistic industry in India which flourished so highly in China. Though kaolin and other suitable kinds of clay are abundant in India, China was not manufactured in India. Only in modern times has indigenous China ware appeared on the market (since the Hindu restrictions as to food and drink are observed with less severity), and such cups are now made ready for public use especially in tea shops. In fact, the drinking of tea (and coffee in the south) has become quite popular in India, and the general fear of pollution does not apply anymore to the tea or coffee cup, though in the more conservative rural areas clay cups are still widely used, as they can be thrown away after use.

In most parts of the country the potters own land, and in others take service in large households. In the Telugu tracts the potters are even in request for cooks, and cooking is one of their traditional occupations in that region.

The potters of northern India are commonly called Kumhar, but in Garhwal they go by the name of Pajai; in the Punjab they are often called Gumiya. In these regions the potters are true menials of the village, and receive their customary dues at harvest time, in exchange for which they have to supply each household in the village a certain number of earthen vessels. The potters, since they keep donkeys, also carry grain in gunny bags, and transport sand, manure, fuel, bricks and the like in the off-season when pottery work is slack.

In the Punjab and in northern India in general a potter's social status is low, not much above that of the Chamar. The potter's tradi-

tional association with the donkey, the vehicle of the smallpox goddess Sitala Mata, and his readiness to collect rubbish and sweepings make him polluted. But Brahmins fix the auspicious days for his marriage and occasionally function as their priests though in the past barbers acted as priests at their weddings and funerals.

In north-eastern India the social position of the Kumars or Kulalas, as they are called there, is equally low. In Assam the Kumars have been declared a backward caste. The potters are probably an offshoot of the Kalita and Kewat castes; they lost their former caste status by engaging in pottery work.

The trade of the potter in Assam is nowadays not very rewarding. Thus many potters are forced to abandon it and take to farming. Pottery is at its best a seasonal industry in north-eastern India. The season starts in October and lasts through the winter months. During the rest of the year the potters work in the fields, or as carpenters, masons, tailors or in business.

The potters of Assam use the wheel, but only men are permitted to work it. Women form pots and plates simply by hand.

The position of the potters in West Bengal is much better. Among the low castes they take the highest rank, and are superior even to the ironsmiths and carpenters. All caste Hindus, even Brahmins, accept water from them.

Most potters still practise their traditional calling, but not throughout the year. There are months when they can earn nothing as potters. Then they do field work as independent cultivators or as farm servants. They also do casual labour or engage in petty trade. In joint families some men do field work while others produce pottery.

The potters of Bengal are sub-divided into various sub-sections which are endogamous and do not interdine. They will not even accept water from each other. Each section has its own caste council and caste officers who watch over the observance of the caste regulations and punish offenders. The usual punishment is a fine, only in extreme cases may an offender be expelled from the community.

The potters worship Visvakarma on the last day of the month of Paus. The priest is a Kumhar. All the tools of their trade are placed on a spot cleaned and cow-dunged in the pit from which they take their clay. A he-goat is sacrificed, incense burned, vermilion and flowers offered. The priest prays for the welfare of the Kumhar community. The god is believed to be present in the tools. The blood of the victim is sprinkled on the tools, the flesh of the goat is later dis-

tributed among those present.

The Kumhars produce all kinds of pots and plates required by the villagers. They also make the bodies of some drums, and the figurines of horses used as offering gifts. The Kumhars of West Bengal have no *jajmani* system and do not give any free pottery to the villagers. They sell their products directly to the villagers and to outsiders, hawking their wares in the neighbouring villages and selling them in the weekly markets.

But they are aware that their craft is doomed to die out and that they must switch over to other occupations. In West Bengal most potters become cultivators.

The potters of Central India, specifically those of western Central India, are also brick and tile-makers. The women too help in the tile-making. There are potters who use the wheel for forming their pots, others who do not use the wheel but shape all pots by hand; a third group specialises in making toys by hand and never uses the wheel. These three groups are however not endogamous. They are simply professional divisions within the same endogamous caste.

The potters have clans which are exogamous. They do not permit cousin marriage nor levirate. Divorce is forbidden. But widows may remarry.

They worship the local gods. Brahmins serve them in their religious ceremonies. Among the potters some are vegetarian; but the non-vegetarian potters also drink liquor. In Central India they are below the Lohars, though superior to the Chamars.

In Maharashtra the Kumbhars are probably originally members of the agricultural Kunbi caste who specialised in pottery making and thus separated from the mother-caste.

The traditional occupation of the Maratha potters is to manufacture earthenware, mainly waterpots, but also bricks, country tiles, clay toys or statues and idols of the gods. They have artistic talent and their figurines are highly praised for their shape and finish. But some potters had to abandon their traditional occupation and work on a farm, as there are too many potters and there is not enough demand for their wares.

In Maharashtra the potters use always the wheel which is rotated by means of a stick.

The potters in Maharashtra hold themselves superior to all the other caste sections. Among the Maratha potters the Lingayats are supreme. They are strict vegetarians. Therefore they do not interdine

and intermarry with the other potters, who eat meat and drink liquor and accept cooked food from the hands of Koshtis, Dhangars, Nhavis, Kolis, Marathas and Kunbis.

Widows can remarry. Maternal cousin marriage is permitted, but not paternal cousin marriage. In dress the Maratha potters resemble the Kunbis.

In north-eastern Maharashtra, in Nagpur, Chanda, Akola and Amraoti districts, are found the so-called Rana Kumbhars who claim to be Rajputs from Chittorgarh. They say that they were driven away from Chittorgarh after their defeat in 1568 by Akbar. They had to adopt the trade of pottery out of necessity to make a living. They claim Rajput rank.

They have a strong affinity to Muslims. They reside usually near a Muslim locality. They celebrate Moharram, help in the erection of the Panja (palm) and offer Khichri (rice and *dal* mixed) to the Panja which they then eat as *prasad*. They eat the meat of animals only if they have been killed by proper Mohammedan rites by a Muslim priest. They avoid eating fowls.

They manufacture pottery, both big and small earthenware, also bricks and tiles.

The potters in western North Maharashtra (Jalgaon and Dhulia districts) are called Ahir Kumbhars, those in Khandesh Lad Kumbhars. The latter name is probably from Lat, the ancient name for Gujarat. The Lad Kumbhars use a bigger wheel than the Ahir Kumbhars who produce small types of pottery on their small wheel. But the Lad potters produce all types of pottery, including tiles and bricks.

The potters of Gujarat are called Lad or Prajapati. They claim to be Kshatriyas, descendants of a mythical king Daksha Prajapati. But most probably they are former Kunbis whom they resemble in many respects. They have seven endogamous divisions, and each division is sub-divided into exogamous clans. Widows and divorced women are allowed to remarry.

In Gujarat many potters are Vaishnavas by religion. Some follow Ramde Pir.

They prepare vessels of red and black. Their kilns are similar to those of the Maratha Kumbhars. Handmade pottery is fashioned by both sexes, but women are not supposed to handle the wheel.

The potters around Puri in Orissa, on the other hand, belong to the Scheduled Castes. They are organised in eight regional groups, CC-0. In Public Domain. UP State Museum, Hazratganj. Lucknow

but with a headman over all the eight groups. Under him are regional headmen who together with the chief headman form the caste council. They decide with him all the caste affairs, marriage and divorce cases, breach of caste rules, etc.¹)

In Orissa the potters are called Kumbara, the name being a corruption of the Sanskrit word *kumbhakara* (pot-maker, from *ku*, pot).

In Ganjam, their social position is not bad. They belong to a respected class of Shudras. They allow widow marriage.

Besides pots, they also make clay images of deities which are set up in shrines on the sea shore and worshipped by fishermen.

The potters of Andhra are called Kummara. Their social status is that of a good Shudra caste. Under the ancient kings the Kummaras were employed as cooks, and many of them still work in that capacity in Shudra houses.

They do not interdine and intermarry with the potters of Orissa, as the latter are socially low. They themselves claim an impure Brahmin descent, but this claim need not be taken seriously. They generally wear the sacred thread and abstain from eating meat.

Telugu Kummaras have generally adhered to their original industry, namely, the making of pots and tiles. In Andhra the potter is a village servant and gets his annual wages in kind at the time of the harvest. In return he furnishes pots free to the people. He is also bound to supply pots required for communal purposes, such as the worship of the village deity, or a common feeding. The last practice, however, is gradually dying out.

The Kummaras rank higher than the washermen and barbers. All castes, except Brahmins and Komtis, accept sweetmeats from the hands of a Kummara. They accept uncooked food from the hands of Brahmins, Komtis, Kapus and Velmas. But they eat meat and fish, and indulge in intoxicating drinks.

Their religion conforms to the religious beliefs and practices of the village population in the region. They worship their ancestors. On Dasehra they worship the implements of their profession. They wear the sacred thread and abstain from eating meat.

It has been estimated that as far as Mysore State is concerned about 20,000 families are engaged in pottery and another 10,000 families in the brick-making industry. The potters of Kanara are called Kumbara. They are recognised village servants and are paid

¹N. K. Bose, 1900, pp. 149-51.

the customary annual wages in grain at harvest time. It is their duty to supply free a certain number of pots to the caste people of the village, and pots at communal feasts, for common village feasts, and the annual worship of the village deity.

The Kumbaras have a comparatively good social position. They rank higher than the fishermen (Beshtas), the barbers and washermen and are just inferior to the cultivating castes proper, the Okkaligas.

They work on their traditional potter's wheel and in spite of their primitive and simple tools they produce handsome earthenware. In the former times some of them had taken to dyeing cloth, but this occupation has again been abandoned.

The Kumbaras of Kanara observe the Hindu social and religious regulations fairly strictly. Though they eat meat, they abstain from liquor. They allow divorce and widow marriage, but discourage both. By religion they are Hindus, Saivites and Vaishnavas, and also Lingayats.

The potters of Tamilnad go under the name Kusavan. The name is derived from the Sanskrit word *ku*, the earth, and—*avan*, a personal termination.

The Kusavans are regarded as a good Shudra caste. They wear the sacred thread and employ Brahmins as priests though some sub-castes have priests of their own caste. They permit meat-eating. Divorce and remarriage are tolerated if the expenses of the wedding have been paid by the applicants. People have generally a low opinion of their intelligence; few of the Kusavans are educated.

In ancient days, they must have manufactured the large burial urns in which up to the eighth century AD kings and nobles were buried. But much earlier, similar burial urns appear in the megalithic tombs in South India. Were they fashioned by the ancestors of the Kusavans?

Some families of the Kusavan caste have the privilege and the ability to mould the large clay images of deities, especially of the "Seven Sisters", goddesses of epidemics, or of children, animals and other objects desired by votaries. The figures of these are placed in front of the shrine or image of the deity as a reminder. Large clay horses are also put up in honour of god Ayanar, the guardian god of the fields. In some of his temples the potters act as priests.

The potters of Tamilnad have the reputation of being expert bone-setters. But it appears that their reputation is not always justified and bones are set wrongly or their inept treatment leads to gangrene.

3. *Smiths, Carpenters and Masons*

The function of a blacksmith is of vital importance for the agricultural work of the Indian villagers. He makes and mends all the iron implements of agriculture required in the villages such as the plough-share, axe, sickle, goad and other articles. He also makes the iron tyre for the cart-wheels and fits it on. He is therefore a village menial who receives his annual remuneration from the harvest of the cultivators like other village servants, the potter, washerman and oil-presser. Yet in spite of his importance the blacksmith is of low social status though not exactly an untouchable. Various reasons are given for his low caste status, the inauspicious black colour of iron, the dirty work, the use of bellows made of cow-hides, the economic dependence on the villagers. But the real reason is probably the contempt nomadic animal breeders have for manual work. Among most shepherd races the blacksmith is despised and often feared as a dealer in black magic. The Aryans originally belonged to this shepherd culture, and they may have brought their disrespect for the blacksmith along from their ancient homelands.

Curiously in Ladakh the lowest caste of all is that of the blacksmiths. They rank with the musicians. These low castes are called Bem.

Also in the hills of Himachal Pradesh and in Nepal the blacksmiths belong to the impure castes. This estimation of the artisan castes is obviously based on old tradition. It is known from the Jatakas, for instance, that in the time of the Buddha the blacksmith and the carpenter (*vaḍḍaki*) were outcastes who had to live outside the village.¹

It seems that in India blacksmiths, carpenters and masons belong to one community, and in some regions they still do all three jobs alternately whenever required. In other places blacksmiths and carpenters pursue their separate occupations, but they interdine and intermarry. The same is the custom between carpenters and masons. In the Himalayan hills there is least distinction between the three trades, but in the plains at the foot of the hills the caste distinctions have already hardened to such an extent that intermarriage is rare though they still interdine.

The social position of the Lohars is low, even for village menials; in the Punjab in the past even the Jats and others of similar standing will have no social communion with Lohars, though they are not

¹R. Fick, 1972, p. 327.

treated as outcastes like sweepers, for instance. But in modern times much of this discrimination has disappeared, at least in the Punjab.

The Lohar appears to practise very generally the religion of the people whose village he shares. Where Muslims or Sikhs are predominant, he has embraced their respective religion, while in the Hindu areas the Lohars follow the Hindu religion.

Like the Lohars, the carpenters—Barhai, Barhi, Tarkhen, or Khati—are also true village menials, manufacturing or mending all agricultural implements and the household furniture. Only the bullock-cart, the Persian wheel and the sugar-press were in the past not supplied by the carpenter of the village. In modern times machines are anyhow beyond the capacity of simple artisans and must be purchased from a factory.

In the villages the carpenter, though probably of the same caste as the Lohar, is given a slightly higher status. The same is true of the Khati who does both types of work, that of the smith as well as that of the carpenter.

As mentioned above, in the Himalayan mountains the blacksmiths are of low status.

In Spiti, the Lohars (blacksmiths) belong to the Daghis, the menial class which possesses no land and whose members are considered 'outsiders'. They work as smiths, carpenters and musicians. In Lahaul the blacksmiths (Ores) do not only smithy and carpentry work, they also play the drum and other musical instruments at funerals and other religious feasts of the Buddhists. For this service they receive the clothes of the dead.

The smiths (Domangs) and carpenters (Ores) of Kinnaur belong to the landless menial castes, living apart in a separate hamlet, away from the high castes. They in turn, keep aloof of the Kolis and other impure castes; smiths and carpenters of Kinnaur interdine and intermarry. They play the musical instruments for the religious feasts of the high castes. The Domangs produce all the iron agricultural implements which the farmers require, and some of them specialise in the manufacture of the gold and silver ornaments with which the women of Kinnaur like to deck themselves out. The carpenters (Ores or Badhis) produce the wooden implements and the furniture for the high castes; they also build the houses and stables for all the residents for which they are paid in kind at harvest time. But they also work in the fields for wages and their women do domestic service for the landowners.

In Kulu the Thawis, masons and carpenters, are highest in the hierarchy of the Scheduled Castes. Lower in rank are the Barchis or axemen, who fell trees and prepare timber for the Thawis. The Barchi caste is of equal rank with the Daghis or Kolis who are impure.

Still lower are the Lohars who are both iron smelters and blacksmiths. They produce all the iron implements which the Kulu farmers require. But the work they turn out is of poor quality. Silver and gold ornaments for the Kulu women are fashioned by local Suniars and Tatiars, different castes of higher rank. The Kulu high castes carefully avoid physical contact with the Lohars. Socially they keep aloof though the Lohars are economically and ritually indispensable to them. They are the musicians in religious and social festivities.

In Mandi District the Lohars and Tarkhans are among the Scheduled Castes of the highest rank. The two castes intermarry. But though members of the higher castes may drink and smoke with the Lohars and Tarkhans, they will not accept cooked food from them nor allow them to enter their houses.

In Mahasu District the Lohars, with the Chamars, belong to the Scheduled Castes. Though the high castes may invite them for a dinner on the occasion of a wedding or some other feast, they with the Chamars are served separately and invariably last of all. Nor are they permitted to live in a double-storeyed house. They may not use a palanquin (*palki*) for a marriage. They should not use musical instruments such as a *nagara* or *dholak* drum, nor the shahnai flute. But these latter prohibitions are no more strictly enforced.

In Simla District the Lohars are ironsmiths while the Brehmars are goldsmiths. Both castes are the servants of the landlords and dependent on them. They receive their remuneration at harvest time — a certain amount of grain (*shikota*). While they work in the house of the landlord they receive their meals from him. As a general rule each caste is endogamous, but sometimes the Lohars and Brehmars intermarry with each other and also with the carpenters, the Badhis. The Sunars, who are also goldsmiths, belong to a different caste and are superior in rank.

The Badhis or Badis are the carpenters. They too are permanent servants of the land owners from whom they receive food during their work at the house and a certain amount of grain at harvest time. Neither the high castes nor even the Kanets interdine with them or accept water from their hands. The reason is that the Badhis accept

bellows by hand. While the Chapua Kamars produce rather crude agricultural implements, the next higher section, the Bangali or Sat Kamars, make knives, scissors and weapons. They are better craftsmen. But still better are the Karigar Kamars who are experts in the manufacture of country guns. The Chapua Kamars are supposed to have immigrated to Purulia District from Chotanagpur, while the two superior sections came from the east. The bellows of the Kamars are of cow or buffalo hide.

Some fifty years ago the Kamars still collected local iron ore but now the iron must be supplied by the customers.

The Kamars usually produce iron articles and implements on the demand of the villagers. They are commonly too poor to manufacture their wares on their own and offer them for sale in the weekly markets. Since a smith's work hardly supports a family for three or four months the deficit must be made up by casual labour, field service and some other jobs. Yet the Kamars are not prepared to abandon smithery altogether.

Kamar boys receive no special training in their craft. They learn from their elders. Between the age of fifteen and twenty they start working first with small implements which require little skill. After about five years they make themselves independent. Women are not allowed to touch the tools and to take part in a smith's work. They may only help by working the bellows, supplying water and charcoal to the smithy.

The Kamars have one feast connected with their craft, the Visvakarma puja. The sacrificer (*laya*) is the seniormost man in the community. Each family offers a cock for sacrifice.

The Kamars have a clan system. Their clans are totemic and exogamous. They have animal and plant totems. But the totems are not venerated.

The Kamars have a caste council and the caste officials punish those who break the caste laws, demanding fines or their excommunication.

In social status they claim to be just below the potters, but superior to the carpenters and oil-pressers. Wool-weavers (Jugi), cotton-weavers (Tanti), comb and rope-makers (Hari or Sahi), basket makers (Dom and Mahali), broomstick makers (Kharia and Pahari), are in the lowest position.

In West Bengal the blacksmith caste (83,545) is called Lohar. Their main occupation is iron work of all kinds. But in present time many

do daily labour in the fields. They also work as carpenters.

The social status of the Lohars in West Bengal is low; they eat and drink with the Bauris, Bagdis and Mals.

By religion they are Hindus; their religious beliefs and practices vary according to the regional customs to which they invariably adjust themselves. They have no religious convictions or practices of their own. Low Brahmins perform their ceremonies.

In West Bengal there is a caste of brass workers, called Thenthari. They are widely but thinly distributed over the State. They are a dying caste, for their brass ornaments are out of fashion. Many Thentharis had to give up their trade and seek their livelihood as field servants and daily labourers.

Those who still pursue their old trade manufacture mainly grain measures and ornaments from brass and bell metal, also from German silver or german. Occasionally they make ladles in the form of the traditional gourd shell ladles. Specially skilled craftsmen used to make lamps, lamp-stands and images of Lakshmi riding on an elephant and the like.

The Thentharis have no tradition that they ever extracted the metals they use from local materials. Their technique is the lost wax process and direct casting.

The Thentharis are in a bad economic situation. Brass ornaments are no more fashionable. The grain measures last too long to demand new ones soon. Workmanship and skill have widely been lost. The Thentharis were forced by dire necessity to abandon their craft and to work as daily labourers or farm servants. Few of them possess fields of their own.

Those who still pursue their traditional occupation worship Visvakarma on the last day of Bhadra. Visvakarma is the presiding deity of crafts and is worshipped at the spot where the furnace (*shal*) is located. The tools are placed near the furnace and are worshipped by the male head of the family. It is believed that Visvakarma takes his seat in the furnace on that moment. Goats, pigeons and fowls are sacrificed and their blood sprinkled on the *shal*.

The Thentharis have a tradition that their original home is Chotanagpur. They have totemic clans. They observe totem avoidance.

They are regarded as a low caste, but recently they have started to claim identity with the Hindu caste of bell-metal workers, the Kansaris who enjoy a higher caste status.

The carpenters of Bengal, the Sutars, hold a low rank, and Brah-

gifts at funerals. They prepare the bier for the dead. For this reason they are considered unclean. Generally they are endogamous, but occasionally they intermarry with the Brehmars and Lohars.

In Nepal the blacksmiths (Kami), together with the shoemakers (Sarki) and tailors (Damai), are untouchables and stand at the bottom of the social scale. But untouchability is practised exclusively by the caste society of the Newars and Parbatiyas; the tribal groups do not observe caste or untouchability.

While the observance of untouchability in Nepal has never assumed the extreme forms of discrimination current in some parts of India, members of the untouchable artisan castes are nevertheless excluded from most social contacts. They may not enter any part of a touchable's house and no person of clean caste will accept any type of cooked food or even water from the hand of an untouchable.

On the other hand, there is no restriction on occupational cooperation in agriculture and commerce. At harvest and planting time caste Hindus work side by side with untouchable labourers, and persons of any caste avail themselves of the services of untouchable blacksmiths, tailors and shoemakers.

Sexual intercourse and interdining with an untouchable are among the gravest offences which a member of a clean caste can commit and excommunication is the automatic consequence. There are nevertheless cases of Brahmins and Chetris living with untouchable women. They thereby lose their caste-status and completely cut themselves off from the society of their kin and caste-fellows. While such unions, however reprehensible in the eyes of high-caste Hindus, are permissible under the laws of the State, the union of a Brahmin or Chetri woman with an untouchable is a criminal offence, the punishment of which amounts to three years' imprisonment for the man.¹

Around Darjeeling, the blacksmiths are called Kamis. Originally Indians of the plains, they migrated to Nepal where they intermarried with the indigenous tribes. When the part of Sikkim which they inhabit was occupied by the British and was incorporated in Bengal, they became residents of Bengal.

Among the hill castes the social position of the Kamis is decidedly low, though they claim descent from the mythical artisan Visvakarma. They are on the same social level with the Sarkis, the cobblers of Nepal with whom they interdine.

¹C. von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1966, p. 22f.

They claim that they observe the orthodox faith of Hinduism and regard Visvakarma as their special patron. But in fact, their religion is mixed with a strong dose of spirit and ancestor worship.

In the Punjab the blacksmith (*Lohar*), from the Sanskrit *lauha-kara* (a worker in iron), does only iron work. He is one of the true village menials, receiving customary dues in the shape of a share of the field produce, in return for which he makes and mends all agricultural implements of iron, the materials being supplied by the husbandman.

In modern times, when cultivation in the Punjab has largely been mechanised, the Lohars have here and there become skilled mechanics. There are many repair shops in the Punjab villages and towns where even tractors can be repaired. Those Lohars who cannot find employment in their traditional jobs, often do fieldwork. For fieldwork is never degrading.

In the plains of Uttar Pradesh, however, the blacksmiths (*Lohar*) and the carpenters (*Barhai*) belong to a respected Shudra Caste. Even Rajputs accept cooked food from their hands. Their status is higher than that of the potters. They need not settle in a separate part (*mohalla*) of the village. They manufacture and repair agricultural implements, house furniture etc. Some of them have purchased fields and taken to cultivation, especially in villages near big towns where the people often prefer to purchase ready-made articles of better quality in the town shops or markets.

The Kamars, blacksmiths, of Bihar, are distinguished from the Lohars, the ordinary smiths of northern India, by not confining themselves to working exclusively in iron. They work in gold and silver also, and in eastern Bengal make cooking vessels of brass and other similar alloys. Hence they hold a superior rank than the Lohars, and Brahmins will take water from their hands. They pride themselves on not allowing their women to wear nose-rings. Like the other smith-castes, they worship Visvakarma, the divine architect of the Universe, who is often represented by the hammer, anvil, and other tools used in their handicraft.

Like in Chotanagpur, in West Bengal too the Kamars are a caste of iron smelters and workers, distinct from the Lohar caste. The Kamars are found in particular in Purulia District. Their social rank is much lower than that of the Hindu iron smiths, the Lohars. They are divided into three sections: the lowest section, the Chapua or Moghoya Kamars work the bellows by foot; the next higher sections work the

deity is carried around in procession once a year. The cart is then burned.

In Maharashtra there is a caste whose traditional work is making pots out of brass, bell metal and copper. They call themselves Tvashta Kasar. Formerly they claimed to be Brahmins, and in the choice of food and the observance of other customs they closely imitate the Brahmins. However, since the social position of the Brahmins is now somewhat disputed, the Tvashta Kasars have given up this claim. Their physical appearance would support their claim, as they are tall, well-built, with regular features and a fair complexion. They are found in large numbers in Bombay, Poona and Nasik. But they eat fish and the flesh of deer, hare, sheep and goats. They practise cross-cousin marriage, but do not allow widow marriage. Nowadays they have taken up many other professions and as a caste are quite wealthy.

The smiths of South India claim to be Visvakarma Brahmins. They wear the sacred thread of the twice-born and have Hinduised their whole religious and social ritual. But some of them still eat meat and drink liquor. They still belong to the left-hand division of castes, and no caste belonging to the right-hand division, including the Holeyas (untouchables), will eat food or drink water touched by them.

Until recently they suffered from a number of other disabilities; they were allowed to celebrate their weddings only in villages in which there was a temple to their own caste deity Kali. Their wedding procession was not allowed to pass along the streets in which the right-hand castes lived. They were excluded from village assemblies, prayer conventions and marriage feasts of other castes. They were not allowed to wear red slippers.

It appears that the adoption of Hindu customs and rituals by the smiths has drawn the wrath and jealousy of all the other castes upon them so that they are now really treated as outcastes. They have obviously overreached themselves by claiming Brahmin rank.¹

But the real reason for their disabilities is that in the past they in fact were impure. The Tanjore Inscriptions of the great Raja Chola, dated 1004 AD show that the Kammalar (smiths and carpenters) were with the Izhavas, Parayans and Vannans impure castes.

Later, when economic conditions improved and many new temples

¹M. N. Srinivas, 1963, pp. 43-58.

and house were built, their social status rose. The profession of architect and sculptor was highly valued and the craftsmen received generous grants. They were encouraged to settle down in large numbers in closed localities to be available when required. Finally they felt so important that they began to claim Brahmin status and origin.

In Adilabad District of Andhra, the Panchalas consist of artisans who work in the following trades: as iron-smiths, brass-smiths and goldsmiths, as carpenters and stone masons. Members of all these trades interdine and intermarry. They also exchange occupations. The Panchalas call themselves Visvabrahmins and claim to be superior even to the Brahmins. But they eat flesh and indulge in intoxicating drinks. For their religious ceremonies they have their own priests, usually an elderly man of the community. Or a Brahmin officiates for them. Their claim of superiority is laughed at by the high castes.

But in Adilabad District their claim is gradually accepted by the lower castes, and they have started to consult Visvabrahmins about the auspicious time for their undertakings. There Panchalas refuse to accept cooked food and water from any caste.

The blacksmiths among them prepare and repair agricultural implements, such as ploughshares, sickles, iron blades, axes and crowbars etc. The carpenters prepare all wooden agricultural implements and house furniture, even frames and doors.

In Kanara too the various artisans of the Panchala caste interdine and intermarry. The members of the caste are at liberty to follow any of the five occupations, i.e., goldsmiths, brass and copper smiths, iron smiths, carpenters and stone masons. These trades are not confined to particular families or sub-castes, as for instance in northern India, but may be followed according to individual inclination.

Also the Kanara Panchalas claim Brahmin rank. But their claim is much resented and strongly rejected by the high castes. They insist that the touch of a Panchala defiles a Brahmin though his approach does not. Panchala are not allowed to enter the inner shrine of a Hindu temple. But barbers and washermen serve them. The Panchalas, on the other hand, pretend to be defiled by the touch of a Halepaik, Holeyaa or Madiga.

The Panchalas are thus highly Sanskritised and strictly observe the Hindu social and ritual conventions. Generally they forbid meat eating and liquor drinking, but some individuals seem clandestinely to indulge in both. In some regions widow marriage is forbidden, and an adulterous wife is permanently expelled from the community.

mins will not accept water from their hands. Besides ordinary work in wood, they carve conch-shells into bracelets, make images of gods, and paint religious pictures. Their chief object of worship is Visvakarma, the divine architect of the Universe, sometimes represented as a white man with three eyes and bearing a club; but more often he is symbolised by the tools used by the craftsmen, which are set up and decorated with flowers. Offerings are presented to him, and the god is besought to favour his votaries in their profession during the coming year.

Socially on the same level with the carpenters are the Chhuturs or Sutradhars, a curious small caste, which makes the masks for the Chhau dance, very popular in Manbhum. The Chhuturs are below the iron-smiths in social status, but superior to the Harijan castes.

The Chhau dance is a pantomimic dance in which scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Puranas are enacted. The dancers wear appropriate masks while they represent themes through bodily gestures and other symbolic expressions. Local musical instruments accompany the dance.

The masks portray various deities, heroes, birds and beasts. Formerly the masks were made of wood and bamboo, and pumpkin shells. This explains the connection of the Chhuturs with the carpenters. Of late, however, cloth, paper and clay have replaced the old materials for the masks.

In the off-season the Chhuturs do various kinds of carpentry work, making bedsteads and other household furniture, toys, doors and windows, palanquins, etc. But some are forced to take employment as field servants and casual labourers. On the whole, the Chhuturs have so far not abandoned their specific occupation.

For the sale of their products they depend on clients living often in distant villages. Agents peddle their masks from house to house, but also on weekly markets and annual fairs.

Nowadays the Chhuturs complain that interest in the Chhau dance is on the decline, the sale of masks is much less and they will have to look out for other employment.

In Central India the Lohars pursue the same occupation as in northern India. They are Hindus who practise infant marriage. They allow widow marriage. But a Lohar widow has the right to choose herself her next husband. She is married off from her parental house, not from that of her former husband. Her children, and all the property she has to leave behind with her former in-laws. A Lohar woman

helps her husband in his work; she blows the bellows and holds the hot iron while the man wields the hammer. Socially they are placed below the cultivating castes which they serve.

The Lohar manufactures and keeps in repair all the iron implements of his clients, from the tip of the bullock goad, the blade of the harrow to the iron ploughshare. The client is supposed to supply the iron material, but the blacksmith forms or refits it into proper shape. He serves all the farmers, even the Harijans. He is kept very busy during the period just before the farming season starts and during the monsoon months. Whenever possible, he works outdoors in front of his house. He is rarely alone; his clients and idle onlookers squat nearby and chat with him and discuss village affairs.

The carpenter, on the other hand, maintains the wooden implements of his farmer clients (plough, seed-drill, harrow, sickle, bullock goad, etc.). The materials are supplied by the farmer, unless he prefers the carpenter to get them, when he pays for their cost. The manufacture of the bullock carts and any household furniture are outside the carpenter's annual duties, and are made for cash. But running repairs to a client's bullock cart is, however, done free, unless it requires major work.

Carpenters work usually in their own sheds, which are favourite gathering places for clients and others. Carpenters serve all farmers of whatever caste. They are particularly busy just before the farming season starts. Farmers put off necessary repairs of their implements generally until the last moment and find that their implements need repair only when they take them out for immediate use.

In the Nimar district there are several village artisans and servants who are paid in kind by customary contributions from the villagers. The village Lohar and Barhai, or carpenter and blacksmith, get 3 to 4 *kuros* or 30 or 40 lbs of grain each per plough of two bullocks for repairing the iron and wooden implements of agriculture. They also receive a *dhuli* or sowing-basket full at seed-time.

In Orissa, the blacksmiths are called Komaros and the carpenters Badhoyi. Both sections from one caste and they interdine and intermarry. The name Badhoyi is derived from the Sanskrit *vardhaki*, one who changes the form. There is a sub-section, Korti (the saw), the members of which are wood-sawyers. Socially the blacksmiths and carpenters are equal to the lower cultivating castes, the Doluvas and Kalinjis. They do not aspire the rank of Brahmins, like the Kammlans. It is their privilege to manufacture the cart on which the temple

to have originally been Kannala, meaning 'one who rules the eye', or 'one who gives the eye'. When an image of a god was consecrated in a temple, at the close of the ceremony, the Kammalan who had made the image came forward and carved the eyes of the deity. Another explanation is that the name signifies 'one who makes articles which please the eye'.

As the Kamsalas and further north the Panchalas, the Kammalans too are made up of five occupational sections: the gold-smiths, the brass-smiths, the carpenters, the stone-masons, and the blacksmiths. Usually the various sections still intermarry, but in towns the gold-smiths have started to prohibit intermarriage with the blacksmiths.

The Tamil Kammalans claim more strongly to be Brahmins and affect Brahmin ways of living. They do not touch meat nor liquor. Widow marriage and divorce are prohibited, though in the past both were permitted. Also in Tamilnad their claims are disputed by the high-castes.

The work of the Kammalans in metal, stone and wood is ordinarily rather coarse and rough and not well finished. The designs are of a stereotyped traditional form and do not change. Only since the arrival of the British and the availability of better tools has their work somewhat improved. It appears that the Kammalans possess the necessary skill for excellent work, but it is rarely demanded by their customers, nor adequately remunerated. But in the past they certainly have produced great works of art, as the temple sculptures and images prove. And when there is a demand and proper remuneration, the Kammalans are even today able to produce excellent work. This is shown by their skilful imitations of ancient works of temple art as well as the serial production of ivory carvings, today a profitable home industry.

It is interesting that the Kammalans of Malabar, though artisans like those in Andhra and Tamilnad, are treated as a polluting caste by the local Hindu castes. They do not claim to be Brahmins nor do they wear the sacred thread. They were not allowed to enter the temples until recent times. In the past their approach within 24 paces to a Brahmin polluted him. The Malabar Kammalans practised fraternal polyandry in the past.

They are also divided into five occupational sections which interdine and intermarry. But to some sections a sixth occupational group is added, either the leather workers, or fellers of trees and sawers of wood. These two caste-sections are treated as untouchables by the others.

The Malabar Kammalans do not keep any social contact with the Tamilian Kammalans. They neither interdine nor intermarry with them.

A sub-section of the Malayalam Kammalans are the Kolla Kurup. They combined two professions in the past which at first sight appear to be a strange combination: shampooing and massage with the manufacture of leather shields. But the two arts are intimately connected with the system of physical training and the exercise of arms which formed the traditional curriculum of the gymnasium (*kalari*) for the Nayars and other warlike castes.

4. Oil-Pressers

Indians use much vegetable oil for food and many other, mainly domestic and religious, purposes. In all regions where oil-yielding seed or nut is grown, an oil-press can be found. The material most extensively used for food in the interior is sesame, with linseed and the castor-bean for burning. Along the coast the coconut is the chief oil producing material.

It is curious that the castes engaged in oil-extraction do not enjoy the same social status everywhere. Generally, their rank is low, because, first of all, Manu classed oil-pressing a base occupation. The reason probably is that the process of extracting oil is undeniably a dirty one; but there are degrees even in impurity. Those who are lighting the temples, for instance, are highest in rank among the oil-pressers, and those who only press sesame, or oil used in cookery, are in most places higher than those who produce oil used for burning or lubrication. For such oil is of an inferior quality.

But even the manner of extracting the oil may be a valid reason for caste discrimination. Those who get out the oil by burning the seed, and the numerous oil-pressers who use the press, belong to separate sub-divisions which are endogamous and frequently do not even eat together. Oil-pressers who yoke two bullocks to the press take precedence over those who use only one, and the sub-sections are named accordingly. Nowadays the oil is often pressed out automatically, and the blindfolded bullock is relieved of its dull and endless toil. But the trade has suffered considerably from the competition of kerosene oil for burning purposes, and the motor-run press has put out of work numbers of oil-pressers who are thus forced to adopt other occupations.

There is, however, a caste of iron smelters and smiths in Andhra and Kanara, which has no social contact with the Panchalas. It is called Salahuva Vakkalu in Kanara, and Salapu Kapulu in Andhra. The community is spread far and wide over Kanara. They generally live in the villages.

A century ago the Salahuva Vakkalu were quite wealthy as the iron which they mined and smelted in a primitive manner was much in demand and fetched a good price. But with the import of iron from abroad the wealth of the caste has much declined, and many had to change their occupation and take to agriculture to earn a living.

The Salahuvas are not a low caste and associate only with the high castes. They eat meat, but abstain from liquor. They strictly conform in all respects with the respectable Hindu castes.

The Gudikaras or Gudigars residing in Shimoga District of Kanara are a superior type of carpenters. The name is a corruption of the Sanskrit word *kuttakar*, a carver. Or it derives from *gudi*—a wooden doll. Gudikar means temple workers, carvers, painters and drawers of pictures. Sometimes they are called Rathakar or chariot builders. At one time they belonged to the class of carpenters, but then specialised in the finer arts of carving and painting. Now they claim Kshatriya rank and are indeed accepted as a good caste and placed on par with the trading caste. They wear the sacred thread. But they are still not admitted into the innermost shrine of the temple and may not attend the highest forms of Hindu liturgy performed by Brahmans. Most of them eat meat and drink liquor. They also eat fish. Some groups allow widow marriage.

They specialise in carving sandalwood, ivory and ebony with great skill. Unlike most artisans, they do not stick to old designs, but are ever anxious to invent new ones or imitate designs from outside. Their products fetch good prices. The women help the men in making articles of pith. They generally work to order. But their chief calling is painting and engraving. Nowadays members of other castes too have adopted this trade, even Brahmans. Sandalwood carving fetches a good income, as tourists eagerly buy these articles and the emporiums in Indian cities sell a fair amount of products of this type.

The Gudikaras have a reputation of being unsteady, dishonest, lazy and careless in their work.

Another carpenter caste with high-caste pretensions in Tamilnad is that of the Chaptegaras or Cheptegaras. They wear the sacred thread and employ Brahmans as priests. They strictly observe the Hindu cus-

toms with regard to infant marriage and forbid widow remarriage, but eat meat and drink liquor.

Lower down in Kerala, a caste of coppersmiths, the Chembottis, are in a similar position. They are regarded superior in social rank to the Kammalans because their forefathers made copper idols for the newly built temples and they were also employed to cover the inner shrine's roof (*sri-kovil*) with copper. This work for the temples raised their social rank. The story goes that when the great temple at Taliparamba was consecrated with unprecedented grandeur and the attendance of a thousand Brahmins, suddenly a Chambotti, who had put the finishing touches to the roof of the Sri-kovil, emerged from the temple. All were aghast, for his presence nullified the whole expensive ceremony. But a compromise was found: a priest had a vision in which the deity declared that the whole Chembotti caste was not a polluting caste, and there was no necessity to repeat the consecration ceremony.

The artisans of Andhra Pradesh call themselves Kamsalas. They are found northward as far as Berhampur in Orissa. They are believed to have come from Tamilnad and to be an offshoot of the Kammalans. They also trace their descent from Visvakarma the architect of the gods and claim Brahmin rank. But the other castes do not acknowledge this claim. They object strongly to the right of the Kamsalas to be carried in a palanquin on the occasion of a marriage. The Kamsalas were in the past also forbidden by the Brahmins to white-wash their houses. At present, this is much encouraged by the municipality.

The Kamsalas, conforming to high-caste rules, forbid their widows to remarry and also prohibit divorce though in former times both were permitted. The Kamsalas of Ganjam and Vizagapatam, however, are more modest in their claims. They rear poultry and eat meat, and also drink liquor. They do not pretend to have Brahmin *gotras* (clans), but have the lineage system. Some of their sub-divisions, especially the blacksmiths, do not wear the sacred thread. In Vizagapatam District only the lowest castes accept cooked food from the Kamsalas. Thus it appears that the high claims of the Kamsalas are not accepted by the local castes.

There are two begging castes, the Panasas and Runjas, who only beg from Kamsalas. According to their traditions, they are degraded Komatis (merchant caste) who in ancient time were given help by the Kamsalas.

The artisans of Tamilnad are called Kamalans. The name is said

The Telis of Orissa practise widow remarriage and divorce. In recent times they have tried to forbid these customs. In former times they were not allowed to cultivate land nor to sell betel leaves; now this rule has been relaxed as the Telis find it difficult to get employment. Especially those with a higher education look for other employment, but many are unemployed while they feel superior to do an oil-presser's work.¹

On the west coast of India, in Gujarat, the oil-pressers are called Ghanchis of Modhera in North Gujarat, while their clan names are those of Rajputs. But there is no real foundation to their claim. Ghanchis have nine endogamous divisions of a territorial kind. Their castes status is low. But Hindus do not consider them untouchables; they are of about equal rank with the carpenters and calico-printers.

The majority of them still perform their hereditary profession and press oil in the traditional way from sesame, coconut, castor and linseed. Some make a living as grocers, selling grain, fruit, vegetables, milk, butter and sweetmeats, or by lending money.

In custom and belief they closely resemble the Banias and Kinbis. Those who deal in oil are often dirty, their clothes being spotted with oil.

The oil-pressers of Kanara are called Ganiga or Gandla (in Telugu). The name is derived from a name meaning oil-mill. The Ganigas are also known as Jyotiphana (community of the lamp), for they provide oil for the lamp.

The Ganigas claim that they came from the north of India and originally they were Kshatriyas of the Solar race.

In Kanara they are divided into exogamous sections according to the religion, being either Vaishnavas or Lingayats. Other distinctions are made according to custom, as for instance, whether they use a single bullock or a pair to drive their mill, or whether they have mills of stone or of wood. These sections do not even interdine with each other.

In Kanara the oil-pressers also trade in oil-seeds. Some have taken to cultivation or trade.

In Kanara their social status is fairly high though oil-pressing is one of the occupations prohibited to the twice-born castes (*dvija*). They are as a rule vegetarians, drink no liquor and observe strictly

¹N.K. Bose, 1960, pp. 1-79.

the Hindu regulations in social contact in order to maintain their good standard. Unlike the central Indian Telis, they do not allow remarriage of widows and divorce.

The oilpressers of Andhra are called Gandlis. Their social status is low. They eat meat, even pork, and drink liquor. And they practise infant marriage. The Gandlis who have migrated to central India have largely abandoned their traditional calling. They have acquired land, and earn their livelihood by trade and shopkeeping. Some have become money lenders. Their ambition is to be identified with the Bania caste. In central India they have indeed bettered their social position and now enjoy a status higher than due to Telis elsewhere.

In Tamilnad, the oil-pressers are known as Vaniyan or Sekkan (oil-press man). The word *vaniyan* signifies a trader, and the Vaniyans not only produce oil, but sell it also. But the Vaniyans claim to be Vaishyas though their claim is not everywhere accepted. They have donned the sacred thread in more recent time. But some are known to eat meat still. At least some sub-sections have a low caste status; at Tinnevely the Vaniyans were in the past not admitted into the temples. But those sections which provide oil for the temples enjoy a better status and receive better treatment from the Hindus. Brahmins officiate in their religious functions.

The oils pressed out by the Vaniyans are of sesame, coconut, groundnut and other kinds. According to the Shastras the crushing of sesame (gingelly) seeds and the sale of gingelly oil are sinful acts. This explains partly the low social status of the Vaniyans.

The Vaniyans forbid widow marriage, practise infant marriage and strictly observe the Hindu regulations for food and social conduct.

The Vaniyans in Kerala are also called Chakkans. They resemble the Nayers in their beliefs and customs of living. But they do not wear the sacred thread, nor do they employ Brahmins as their priests. The Vaniyans in North Malabar are treated as a lower caste than those in the South. In North Malabar a Nayar feels polluted by the touch of a Vaniyan whereas in South Malabar the Vaniyans have entered the ranks of the Nayar caste. They call themselves Vattakaddans.

The Vaniyans of Cochin are called Vaishya, and wear the sacred thread. In regard to marriage rites, religious ceremonies, dress and ornaments etc., the Vaniyans differ little from the Konkani oilpressers. But since they do not completely abstain from eating meat

But the oil-pressers are generally an enterprising community and are flexible enough to shift to other occupations. Many take to farming or shop-keeping. Those who become prosperous prefer to forget their former impure occupation and aspire to a higher social status. Wealth is quite helpful in realising their aspirations. Another important factor is the strict observance of the Hindu regulations concerning food and social contact. Religion too plays an important role in attaining social status.

The Punjab is a state in which plenty of oilseed is grown. The number of oil-pressers, called Teli (from the Sanskrit word *taila* or *tailika*) or Chaki or Chakani (miller), is consequently quite large.

In the Punjab the social status of the oil-pressers is quite low, about the same as that of the Julahas (Muslim weavers), with whom they share a restless and troublesome character. Perhaps due to the low social rank which the Telis hold, those who had to change their occupations have often been forced to adopt even lower jobs. Thus many Telis in the Punjab have become cotton scutchers (Penja) or butchers (Qassab). These jobs are of course reserved mainly for Telis converted to Islam. Most of the Telis, as also the Penjas and Qassabs, prefer to live in towns and cities. In certain areas of northern India they also earn their livelihood by market-gardening.

In central India too the social position of the oil-pressers is low. They rank much below the blacksmiths and carpenters, and Brahmins will not enter their houses and accept water from them. The oil-pressers are very numerous in central India; many have given up their occupation and taken to cultivation. Some have become money-lenders and amassed wealth.

Some enterprising Telis in central India call themselves Rathors, they have dropped the name Teli altogether and claim Rajput descent. They have abandoned oil-pressing and are now cultivators. It is said that at Burhanpur during the Muslim rule the Gujarat Telis had taken to trade and had become affluent. But the Muslims found a subtle way to keep them socially degraded by assigning the removal of dead elephants to the Telis, which no other caste would consent to do, and also to dig the graves for Mohammedans. The Telis of course now protest strongly against these allegations and claim that they were Modh Banias in Gujarat and only adopted the occupation of oil-pressers after coming to Burhanpur.

In central India the Telis are a caste of bad omen. To see a Teli early in the morning is inauspicious. They are considered to be very

talkative and quarrelsome, also stingy and cunning. They also have the reputation of being powerful magicians. That Telis can be bold and enterprising is shown by the fact that in Jehangir's time and under Warren Hastings some Telis became very influential civil servants and used their position with great skill for the advancement of their caste fellows.

In Bengal the oil-presser (Teli) is treated as unclean and Brahmins refuse to officiate for him. The Teli ranks with the washerman and liquor-seller. But a large section of the Telis had centuries ago given up the messy job of extracting oil and taken to the cleaner and more profitable profession of selling sesame seeds and betel nuts. Later they expanded their trade still more and became grain-dealers and shopkeepers. Some grew quite wealthy and influential. These Telis then changed their caste name into Tilli and pretended to be descended from a reputable caste. They succeeded in convincing the higher castes of their good caste status, with the result that Brahmins now function in their religious rites and even accept drinking water from their hands.

In Orissa too oil-pressers are called Teli. In recent times they have occasionally adopted other names like Tailka Vaishya, Sadhza Teli, or Kuvera-putra, etc., but these new names have never become popular.

The oil-pressers of Orissa are divided into three endogamous subdivisions of unequal rank. In Orissa the higher castes do not accept water and cooked food from Telis and generally avoid coming into physical contact with them; a kind of restricted untouchability prevails in Orissa with regard to the oil-pressers. This is more pronouncedly so in the villages while in the towns such a discrimination has more or less disappeared.

The three sections are: Haldia, Khari and Baldia or Thoria. The first two press oil in rotary oil-presses and trade in it. The Baldia or Thoria Teli trade in turmeric which is carried from place to place with the aid of pack-bullocks. The Haldia rank highest and the Baldia occupy the lowest position. Though the three sub-castes do not intermarry, yet their affairs are governed by a joint caste organisation in which all sit together.

They have a strong caste council which efficiently keeps discipline and watches over the observance of the caste rules. The heaviest punishment to be inflicted is expulsion from the caste; other forms of punishment are payment of a fine, or acts of personal humiliation.

and drinking liquor, the Konkanis do not allow them into their houses nor may they draw water from their wells or ponds.

They have their own priests. Many of them are petty merchants and shop-keepers.

Conclusion

This survey of the low castes and outcastes on an India-wide basis has brought out several interesting and perhaps so far unnoticed features and peculiarities. It shows, first of all, that the low castes and Harijans of India are descendants of a people or of peoples in possession of a fairly highly developed and complex culture. It was a farming culture, no doubt, but the ancestors of the present low castes and outcastes were on the whole the artisans and manual workers in this culture. They performed the tasks of blacksmiths, potters, weavers, leather workers, etc. They were well skilled in the arts, in singing, playing musical instruments and dancing, in the composition of songs, poetry, of legends and ballads. They were also the painters and sculptors of this culture. And most probably the wonderful architectures, the temples, palaces and monuments, the very artistic paintings and sculptures in caves and temples, were conceived and produced by the descendants of these early artisans and village servants.

Today thousands of tourists come to admire these works of art, but few are aware of the fact that they were conceived and created by people of humble class, of low descent, often badly rewarded for their wonderful work. Of course, gradually workers in and for the temples and the sculptors of those very artistic figures of gods and goddesses rose in social status and thus it happened that in present times the masons, stone cutters and carvers, the bronze and iron workers in temple and palace and especially the moulders and formers of the idols claim high-caste status, little lower than that of the Brahmins. But certain surviving customs in the caste, and occasionally the treatment of these artisans and craftsmen by the high castes unmistakably reveal their low-caste origin.

Another peculiar feature in the caste system is revealed in the survey carried out here. It is the fact that certain often seemingly separate occupations are linked together and performed by one caste. One may be ritually pure, but because it is linked with another ritually impure occupation the members of the caste are of low

caste and even untouchables. Thus in the north, especially in the Himalayan mountain areas, the blacksmiths are usually also carpenters and masons. There is no reason why the work of a carpenter or mason should be polluting, but their connection with the blacksmith makes carpenters and masons unclean. And the blacksmith is probably not impure so much because his work is often dirty, but because the Aryans—like the animal breeders in Arabia and Africa today—considered the smith an outcaste and untouchable. Traditions die slowly in the isolated hills. And in these mountains the smiths are also the musicians for the high-caste people, as in Arabia and Africa for the animal breeders.

Again, weaving and leather-work are in India often interchangeable occupations. In the Himalayan hills both trades are performed by the Kolis. In the Gangetic plains weavers may turn into leather workers, and leather workers into weavers. Now weaving is a pure trade, while leather work and tanning are not. Thus the weaver too becomes ritually impure. And moreover, both weavers and leather workers are often employed as village watchmen whose task it is to remove dead cattle from the houses and the village. And this most degrading task of the village watchman leads to a further social degradation: the eating of carrion. Wherever weavers and leather workers do this or are known to have done it, they are treated by the Hindus as untouchables.

Indians are great lovers of the performing arts. Good singers, musicians and dancers always find a rapt audience. Yet the artists were until quite recently regarded as low-castes if not untouchables. Is it because the tradition of the animal breeders associates these arts with the impure blacksmiths? or are the artists of low social rank because they are economically dependent on the audience? For such economic dependence makes a man or social group vulnerable and therefore socially low. This is shown in the treatment of the Pardhans and Ojhas by the Gonds, and of the various beggar sections in South Indian castes. Though caste fellows originally, they are now treated as untouchables by their own brethren.

The leather workers who tanned the skins, cured them and dyed them, made shoes and saddles and leather bags, also used to cut leather into the figures of gods and heroes and presented them in the once very popular traditional shadow plays. Thus the leather workers became sculptors and painters, and also the composers of popular dramas and comical plays interspersed with plenty of musi-

cal compositions of their own, all for the entertainment of the villagers. And these leather workers produced not only shoes and all the leather work for the farmers, but also all leather articles of the warriors such as saddles, bridles, scabbards, armoury, and in modern time purses, bags and all kinds of luxury articles. It does not matter that leather is now often discarded and other material is used, plastic, imitation leather, even metal. The artisans producing modern luxury articles and toilet utensils, etc., may have discarded leather altogether, but since these articles were produced by leather workers the workers are still regarded as low-caste people. It is not easy to escape untouchability.

Weaving is not only connected with leather work and village watching, it is also linked with cloth dyeing and printing, and with tailoring. The washerman too may turn into a cloth dyer or stamper, but usually dyers and printers of cloth belong to castes split off from the weaving caste. These artisans may not be regarded any more as untouchables, but their former connection with the weavers has not been forgotten.

On the other hand, if it benefits the high castes, untouchability may be conveniently forgotten or ignored. This has happened in many places with castes derived from untouchable fishing castes. As the high castes had to travel and needed boatmen, palanquin bearers and attendants on their journeys and cooks, they forgot about the low caste status of the boatmen, palanquin bearers and servants, and allowed them to touch and carry them, give them water and food and serve them in various ways. Ocean fishers may still be treated as untouchables in some parts of India, inland fishers are usually low though not untouchables, but many other castes have grown out of the fishing castes such as boating castes, porters and dock workers, domestic servants, cooks, grain parchers, shopkeepers and so on. And of course all of them may turn to farming a piece of land.

The production of salt, from ocean or lake water, the mining of saltpetre, of lime, all kinds of earth-work, road-making, well-digging, dam-building and irrigation work and similar professions usually go together. In themselves these occupations are not really socially degrading, but other circumstances may make them so. Professionals of this type often do not keep physically clean and are often dressed in dirty clothes. They are also not at all fastidious in the choice of their food. They eat all kinds of animals considered impure by the Hindus.

They live apart from the ordinary village folk, often in primitive huts or tents, often changing their residence, not seldom speaking an unknown idiom. They are outsiders and therefore shunned and avoided. In the past some of these castes had the reputation of being inclined to criminal behaviour, theft, robbery, and house-breaking. All this lowered their social status. Though not Harijans, they are actually treated as such.

It is interesting that masons, builders, stone cutters and sculptors have also grown out of these castes. They have formed new sections, adopted a new name and thus attempted to rise a step higher in the caste hierarchy. In some cases they have succeeded in their ambition. These sub-sections are often endogamous, refuse to interdine and intermarry with the other sections, yet they live and work in similar manner.

Another group of low castes is that of the toddy tappers. Toddy-tapping may also develop into a variety of other occupations. The liquor sellers certainly form a sub-section of it. And liquor sellers who have grown rich by the sale of liquor and the exploitation of the drinkers may turn into money-lenders as a profession. Or they buy up land and turn into farmers. Some of the liquor sellers start to sell other articles as well and turn into grocers and shopkeepers. They usually sell grocery, grain and household articles.

The potters form another caste of low social status. They not only produce and sell earthen ware, in some places they have learned to manufacture email pots and plates. When their pottery is not much in demand they switch over to the transport of goods on the back of their donkeys and bullocks. They transport sand and stone or bricks for building work. Potters are also engaged in domestic service.

All these castes engage in field labour when their traditional work is not much in demand. The great mass of agricultural labourers in India is supplied mainly from the ranks of these low castes and out-castes. Since agricultural labour is so often the permanent source of their livelihood, these castes have the strong ambition to acquire a plot of land and to till their own field. But being by tradition artisans and traders, they are often incompetent farmers and soon drift back into their old jobs.

Or they leave the rural areas and shift to the towns and cities in the hope of earning quickly a lot of money and then returning to their home village and buying a field. But in most cases thwarted in

their ambition and forced to remain in crowded slums for life, they often abandon their families and form new connections.

For various reasons the traditional guardians of the village are also usually of low caste. The main reason is that one of their tasks is the removal of dead animals from the houses and the village. Another reason is their humble role as messengers and servants of touring government officials. Yet there are different grades of village watchmen: Watchmen who belong to a caste of former soldiers usually refuse to carry out the degrading work of scavenging and service. They rather employ and pay from their pocket a member of the low castes to do these services. They are afraid of losing caste by such humble service. The same is true of the descendants of former aboriginal tribes, and of former robbers and raiders who got the job of village watchmen to pacify them. Though of low caste, they are not outcastes or Harijans and refuse to remove dead animals from the village. This service is performed by impure leather workers, weavers, toddy tappers and bamboo workers. Some, like the Doms and Mangs, were even employed as executioners by the rulers and generals of the armies.

There is no doubt that the low castes and outcastes bitterly resent their social degradation and their economic exploitation by the higher castes. If we are correctly informed, they have tried since the time of the Buddha by various methods and moves to throw off the stigma of untouchability, to be accepted into Hindu society as respected members of the nation. They have tried to achieve this aim most often and most patiently by a faithful and exact observance of all rules and regulations of Hinduism concerning the choice of food and of social conduct; they have joined religious movements, in particular the Bhakti movements, in the hope and with the promise of social acceptance in the brotherhood; they have tried open defiance and bloody revolts against the ruthless domination of the high castes; they have changed their religion and turned to Buddha, to Mohammed, to Guru Nanak and to Christ, and lately to communism, for liberation from untouchability. All this has not helped them since untouchability was imposed on them by the higher castes and these have never lost their domination over them. Even high-caste social reformers could not help them, not even Mahatma Gandhi.

But there always was and still is a way to rise just a little higher in the estimation of the caste Hindus; and this way the Harijans have often attempted to go in order to escape the curse of untouchability.

It has been shown repeatedly in the present study that Harijans did sometimes succeed in rising at least one or two steps higher in social rank, and in rare cases in escaping untouchability altogether: by giving up their traditional occupation if it is polluting, by observing strictly the Hindu way of life, and last not least, by acquiring a certain amount of wealth and influence in society. Most Harijans believe that the way to achieve this is the acquisition of a field and turning to the occupation of a farmer. But it has been shown in this study that excellence in a certain trade may also help in gaining a respected social status: weavers who produced high quality cloth or worked in silk, smiths who became the moulders or carvers of the figures of gods and goddesses, masons and carpenters who specialised in temple architecture, stone-cutters who became sculptors, and even distillers who became money-lenders or landowners, have risen to the status of clean Shudras, and sometimes even higher.

This liberation is a slow process and often requires several generations to succeed, but in several Harijan castes it has proved successful—they are no more untouchables, but a good Shudra caste.

But these Harijans had to pay a heavy price for their social advancement: usually they were forced to separate from their own caste. Their social rise caused a split in their own caste. For not all members of a caste were always ready to go along in this move. Many people realised that it was doubtful if the ambition of social advancement could be achieved; they also saw that it involved many sacrifices and a radical change from old traditional customs and beliefs to a rather austere way of life. They refused to go along and the ambitious section had to sever all social contact with them. Thus the more enterprising portion of the low castes and outcastes was drained away and given a small consolation price, while the more inert bulk of the low castes remained more securely under the domination of the high castes.

Nor is there unity and solidarity among the Harijans as a class. Were they united, the eighty million Harijans could form a formidable party and place their demands before the nation with much pressure. But the Harijans are unable for concerted action as they continually fight each other for a higher rank and for social prestige. They are more caste-minded than the higher castes. The abolition of untouchability cannot come from them.

The abolition of untouchability can only be achieved in India when the whole population and especially the higher castes can be convinced

that it is unjust and harmful for the Indian nation as a whole to treat at least one fifth of the Indian population as an alien body in the nation and to continue to deprive them of the basic human rights. This is being done in spite of all assurances given by the main political parties of India.

Indian social reformers have so far not found a solution of the problems of casteism and untouchability. And there is little hope that in the near future a satisfactory solution will be found. This book may help to bring us nearer to a solution by pointing out certain facts which so far seem to have escaped the attention of not only the social workers and politicians, but also of social scientists specifically studying these problems.

Unfortunately many high-caste people may even deny that there exists a problem. They are not willing to admit that the eradication of untouchability and casteism is necessary. They see in these practices sacred ancient rules and laws and feel elated by the fact of their high birth and take pride and pleasure in being superior to others, though through no merits of their own.

But there is hope: Indian society has already changed much in the last few decades. And this trend is bound to go on. Soon it will approach a stage when the feudal structure so long prevalent in India will have to give way to a new structure in which every Indian citizen of whatever caste or creed is granted at least the basic human rights. Inequality will always remain, but the denial of the basic human rights in the name of religion and ancient Hindu law to one fifth of the Indian nation will have to go. May the higher castes have the grace to grant the Harijans these basic human rights willingly before they are wrested from them by force. Or it may soon come to pass that the higher castes find themselves over-run by a strong current which leaves them hopelessly behind, bereft not only of their imaginary dignity, but also of their former power and wealth!

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Rev. Fr. Stephen Fuchs, an Austrian by birth, first came to India in 1934. He was awarded the Ph.D. degree in Anthropology by Vienna University in 1950 and was Professor of Cultural Anthropology at St. Xavier's College, Bombay, from 1950 to 1954. He has also taught physical and cultural anthropology at diverse Catholic institutions in India. During 1961-62 he was in the Philippines at the San Carlos University, Cebu City, as Visiting Professor of Anthropology and Indian Philosophy. Since 1967 he is Director of the Institute of Indian Culture, Bombay.

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